University of Alberta

Understanding the Issue of Dropouts:
A Young Offender Perspective

by

William Thomas Smale ©

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Velma,
and to the memory of my father, William.

Abstract

This study is about 12 male school dropouts who "ended up behind bars." The perceptions of these 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old young offenders were explored to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. The study was driven by the General Research Question "Why did these incarcerated youths leave school early?" The data were collected from institutional files, school records, and interviews with the participants.

This study's research design lies within the qualitative spectrum; data were gathered from semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted with purposively selected *in situ* participants, that is, participants incarcerated in a secure-custody detention facility. The study employed a multiple-case-study approach to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. In particular, 12 case studies were developed and analyzed to explore the research topic. The data were organized into three thematic sections, all of which corresponded respectively to the study's three specific research questions.

This study's findings and conclusions confirmed that family background, personal, school, and criminal characteristics are all related to early school leaving. In particular, the major findings revealed that low socioeconomic and single-parent status, low parent education, frequent mobility, parental substance abuse, parental rejection, marital discord, child abuse, early behaviour problems, gang involvement and negative peer associations, anger-management problems, delinquent behaviour, substance abuse, excessive hours worked during the school week, low degree of extracurricular participation, enrollment in nonacademic courses, poor grades, low ability in English and mathematics, low educational aspirations, school discipline problems including suspensions and expulsions, boredom, and absenteeism are all associated with dropping out. Moreover, further analysis also showed that the participants were of average intelligence, enjoyed their elementary school years, had several friends while attending school, experienced little school alienation, and expressed the desire to eventually return to the academic environment.

Due to the purposive sampling techniques, this study's results cannot be generalized beyond the participants. Based on the findings and conclusions of the dissertation, the research literature, the participants' views and the researcher's experience, the study did, however, identify several recommendations for practice and further research.

Acknowledgments

I must first extend my sincere thanks and acknowledgment to the twelve young offenders who allowed me to interview them under somewhat adverse conditions. The protection of privacy laws under the *Young Offenders Act*, however, prohibit me from acknowledging them by name.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

> Nothing fortuitous happens in a child's world. There are no accidents. Everything is connected with everything else and everything can be explained by everything else. (Berger & Mohr, 1976, p. 122)

Purpose of the Study

This study is about 12 male school dropouts who "ended up behind bars." The perceptions of these teenage offenders (all between 16 and 18 years of age) were explored in order to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. The terms "early school leaver" and "school dropout" are used synonymously throughout the study to refer to these youths. The study was guided by the research question "Why did these incarcerated youths leave school early?" The design of the study lies within the qualitative spectrum; data were gathered and analyzed from semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted with purposively selected *in situ* participants, that is, participants incarcerated in a secure-custody detention facility. Kvale (1996) provided the rationale for the method, suggesting, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" (p. 1).

Justification for the Study

Since the 1930s, the overall proportion of early school leavers has declined considerably in Canada (Guppy & Davies, 1998). Despite this pattern of decline, however, dropout rates remain high in relation to those in other developed countries (e.g., Colombo, 1998; Gilbert, Barr, Clark, Blue, & Sunter, 1993; Lafleur, 1992; Oderkirk, 1993). Concerns over the dropout rate have been escalating in Canada and were featured in the Statistics Canada School Leavers Survey (SLS, 1991) and the School Leavers Follow-up Survey (SLF, 1995), commissioned to measure the extent of the dropout problem and to report on factors associated with early school leaving. The findings of these studies and others (e.g., Alberta Advanced Education Career & Development, 1993;

Durksen, 1994; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996) estimated that 15% to 18% of young Canadians drop out of school annually. Earlier research (e.g., Denton & Hunter, 1991; Employment and Immigration, 1990a, 1990b; Jansen & Haddad, 1994; Radwanski, 1987; Statistics Canada, 1990; The Canadian Press, 1991) suggested that much higher dropout rates exist. These sometimes dramatic figures have attracted much media attention and public discourse.

It is generally assumed that young people disadvantage themselves by dropping out of school. Although this statement has received strong literary and research support, many relatively young individuals still decide to postpone or end their formal schooling (Light, 1995). Using estimates derived from a large national representative stratified random sample of 6,284 youths, the SLF (1995) study concluded that in 1995, roughly 160,000 Canadians aged 22 to 24 had left high school without a Grade 12 diploma (Frank, 1996a). This statistic highlights the severity of the problem in Canada and demonstrates that concern about early school leaving is warranted. Irrespective of which dropout statistics are accurate, large numbers of students still leave school early, resulting in a squandering of human talent and potential in Canada.

Costs and Consequences of Early School Leaving

At least three harmful effects result when students leave school early. First, dropouts face an increased probability of reduced economic and employment-related prospects. This increase usually translates into a bleak future of minimum wages and part-time jobs or unemployment. Many researchers have studied this effect (e.g., Catterall, 1988; Frank, 1996b; Gilbert, 1993; Peng, 1985; Rumberger, 1987; Sullivan, 1988; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1990; Weis, Farrar & Petrie, 1989). According to Neufeld and Stevens (1991) and Spain and Sharp (1990), the unemployment rate for dropouts will increase as occupations attracting dropouts are eventually eliminated by technological change. Employment and Immigration Canada (1990b) supported this view, projecting that by the next decade, approximately two-thirds of all jobs would demand at least 12 years of formal education and that the "new jobs [would] demand more than 17 years of education and training" (p. 7).

Second, students who leave school early can create enormous social and economic costs for society. Social problems related to school attrition may include higher rates of delinquency, criminal activity, drug abuse, incarceration, and other social pathologies (e.g., Catterall, 1985; 1988; Educational Testing Service, 1995; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Fagan, Piper, & Moore, 1986; Gilbert et al., 1993; Sum & Fogg, 1996; Wolfgang, Thornberry, & Figlio, 1987). The economic costs of the dropout problem may include reliance on social programs such as employment insurance, welfare, and mothers' allowance. Supporting this position, the Educational Testing Service reported in 1995 that approximately 50% of welfare families in the United States were headed by early school leavers. Other economic costs of the dropout problem may be incurred by lost earnings or unrealized taxes (e.g., Catterall, 1988; Gilbert, 1993, 1994; Lafleur, 1992).

Third, the individual costs of leaving school early are immeasurable. Failure to achieve a high school diploma or its equivalent may severely limit an individual's chances of success during adulthood. Students who leave school before obtaining their high school diplomas often struggle both financially and emotionally because of reduced employment prospects, delinquency, drug abuse, low self-esteem, and low achievement. The problem of early school leaving is, therefore, both a collective and individual concern. Leaving school early often leads to frustration and unhappiness, accompanied by an unacceptable loss of human potential. Research confirms that dropouts are less likely than graduates to be employed (e.g., Gilbert, 1993; Peng, 1985; Winters & Kickbush, 1996). Montigny and Jones (1990) claimed that many of the unemployed and illiterate would experience marginalization and be unable to participate fully in society. Raymond (1992) contended that this sector of the population would be sentenced to a life of long-term unemployment, often leading to stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. According to Neufeld and Stevens (1991), low self-esteem is a psychological problem for many early school leavers. The result of low self-esteem is, in these researchers' opinion, recorded statistically in higher rates of welfare, drug abuse, suicide, criminal activity, and deviance.

Deviance and the Early School Leaver

Deviance is intrinsic to school attrition. Judge Zuker (1997) emphasized the importance in Canada of deviance in the dropout equation, pointing out that "failure at school and truancy are early and clear indicators of young persons who are at very high risk of committing offences in our communities" (p. 47). Many researchers have agreed that among particular high-risk groups, especially young males, dropping out of school is associated with disciplinary problems or delinquent activity (e.g., Cato, 1988; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Fagan et al., 1986; Grossnickle, 1986; Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989; Hawkins & Lam, 1987; Janosz, Leblanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Jarjoura, 1993; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990; Thornberry, Moore, & Christenson, 1985; Tidwell, 1988; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). The SLS (1991) study supported these findings, concluding that high school dropouts were more likely than high school graduates to have engaged in deviant behaviour. The same study also concluded that, compared to high school graduates, early school leavers had four times as many criminal convictions and were more likely to engage in substance abuse.

A problem encountered when studying both early school leaving and youth deviance is determining the possible causal relationships. For example, does delinquent behaviour lead to early school leaving, or does leaving school early lead to subsequent delinquent behaviour, or is delinquent behaviour just a good predictor of later early school leaving or vice versa? Drawing upon past research, scholars have suggested the interrelatedness of delinquent behaviour and early school leaving (e.g., Bell, 1976; Cato, 1988; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Polk et al., 1981); however, evidence is mixed regarding the directional causality. Several studies reported that delinquency precedes or even causes dropping out (e.g., Bachman, O'Malley, & Johnston, 1978; Colvin & Pauly, 1983 Elliott & Voss, 1974; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger, & West, 1986; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Mann, 1981), but other studies differ, claiming that dropping out was followed by an increase in delinquency (e.g., Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Polk & Shaffer, 1972; Thornberry et al., 1985) and might even have been linked to adult criminality (e.g., Polk et al., 1981; Thornberry et al., 1985). This multifaceted question appears to have no single answer. Obviously, several combinations and permutations exist between these two ends of the dropout-delinquent continuum. However, Jarjoura (1990), in summing up much of what is known about the dual facets of delinquency and dropping out, asserted that "all the studies examining the relationship between dropping out and delinquency find that youths who eventually drop out have higher rates of offending than other youths while in school" (p. 28).

Both delinquency and early school leaving may have many tortuous causes. Earlier research by West (1984) suggested that socioeconomic status may be a factor in a student's decision to drop out of school. West maintained that working-class adolescents were arrested more often and jailed more frequently than other youths. Similarly, other research suggested that early school leavers had the highest rate of juvenile delinquency (e.g., Bell-Rowbotham & Boydell, 1972; Gilbert et al., 1993). In addition, Haberman and Quinn (1986) claimed that only 1.6% of students who had been incarcerated ever obtained their secondary school diploma. Supporting this position, Cato (1988) pointed out that approximately 70% of Canadian prison inmates had acquired no more than eight years of formal education. Several other research-based studies have also reported similar findings (e.g., Nuttall, 1988; Service correctionnel du Canada, 1992, cited in National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), 1996). These findings suggested a connection between early school leaving, deviance, and structural factors such as socioeconomic status, parental education, and family composition. Despite this connection, few researchers have explored the problem of early school leaving from the perspective of a young criminal offender; consequently, this study seeks to address this gap.

Significance of the Study

Wiersma (2000) advised that a research study should "add to existing knowledge or contribute to the educational process in a meaningful way" (p. 29). In particular, he remarked that the research should be significant from "either a practical or a theoretical viewpoint" (p. 31). Consistent with Wiersma's observation, this study has both practical and theoretical significance.

Practical Considerations

Understanding the practical reasons for early school leaving is desirable given the present interest by parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, ministries of education, and the public in general. Identifying and understanding early school leaving based primarily on a self-report emic perspective may provide a greater understanding of students' educational needs. As well, understanding reasons for early school leaving can also help to improve teaching and administrative practice. The themes and patterns emerging from the data may help teachers and administrators in deciding which courses of action to follow to develop more comprehensive student retention programs. While my purpose is not to develop a particular educational program for young offenders, this study's byproducts may include the improvement of existing programs. As Wiersma (2000) explained, "Research in and of itself may not generate a curriculum or program--these would likely have to be developed after the research is completed--but the research provides the basis for such development" (p. 388).

Theoretical Considerations

Gaps in the literature on early school leaving can be grouped into three general areas. First, although much research has been done within the positivist domain, considerably less research has been conducted from a naturalistic perspective, or from an understanding of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. Given this inadequacy, a fundamental purpose of this study was to address early school leaving by qualitatively probing the dropout-young offender association from several dimensions including its family-background, school, demographic, and criminal characteristics. Analyzing these aspects from a new slant will supply researchers with information about a topic that has received limited scholarly attention. This contribution will supplement the existing literature and clarify the relationship between deviance and early school leaving for this particular subgroup of young offenders.

Second, the literature has suggested that early school leaving should be analyzed from several perspectives and positions using dissimilar populations. For example, Foster, Tilleczek, Hein, and Lewko (1994) emphasized the importance of this when they remarked that "In considering the problem of the high school dropout, the literature on the 'marginal students' or 'students at-risk' of dropping out must also be examined" (p. 74). However, very little research based on the emic perspective, or on the young offenders' own viewpoint, has addressed the issue of early school leaving. Although much research has been done on why young students leave school early, sampling designs have been limited to a subset of the population predominantly unconstrained by its environment, despite the high degree of congruency between incarceration and dropout status.

Third, considerable research has been conducted into the criminal justice system; however, gaps pertaining to the youth justice system continue to exist. This study tried to redress several shortcomings of earlier studies by drawing on information from interview transcripts, document reviews, and other written evidence. Reasons for overlooking this segment of the offender population have been attributed to two main factors: (a) permission to access information on young offenders is strictly prohibited and may be obtained only by court order, vis-á-vis approval from a youth-court judge (s.44.1(k) YOA, 1985) and from the appropriate authorities, and (b) Section 45 of the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) provides for the destruction of all records when the young person found guilty of an offence has not been charged with or found guilty of another offence during a set period. For summary and indictable offences, all records must be destroyed, three and five years, respectively, after the sentence's completion. By using document reviews, the current research revealed the nature and extent of early school leaving from a youth perspective, which otherwise would have been absent in similar studies involving adult offenders.

Overall, insufficient research has been commissioned to address the young offender dropout population in Canada, although roughly 5,000 youths are held in custodial care each day (Fine, 1995, Hung & Lipinski, 1995). Two national school-leaving surveys (SLF, 1995; SLS, 1993) and one national longitudinal survey of children and youth (NLSCY, 1996) illustrated this point more concretely: all three surveys excluded from their analyses those residents living in prison or secure-custody facilities. Systematically excluding young offenders from early-school-leaving studies provides an incomplete picture of the problem. Accordingly, the present investigation addressed this omission by focusing on young offenders as a subgroup of the dropout population.

By examining this group of individuals through the research questions outlined below, at least four outcomes should emerge from the research. First, this study will contribute to knowledge in educational research by providing a finer understanding of the dropout problem. Second, the findings will provide an increased practical and conceptual understanding of the dropout phenomenon. Third, results from this study will be useful for the development of educational policy and practice. Finally, this study will precipitate questions for further research on the dropout-young offender association.

General Research Question

The study was guided by the following major research question: "Why did these 12 incarcerated youths leave school early?"

Specific Research Questions

The following specific research questions are subsumed under the general research question:

1. What demographic and crime-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?
2. What personal and family background factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?
3. What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?

Definitions of Terms

Definitions of conceptual terms are crucial to understanding any field of investigation or inquiry. As Neuman (1997) observed, "A good definition has one clear, explicit, and specific meaning. There is no ambiguity or vagueness" (p. 134). To provide clarity and uniformity, the following definitions of terms were employed in the present study.

At-risk Student: A student more apt than other students to drop out of school before graduation.

Disposition: The sentence a youth court judge gives to a young person guilty of an offence (YOA, R.S.C. 1985, s. Y-1, 20[1]).

Early School Leaver: A pupil who leaves high school for any reason, including expulsion or incarceration, before successfully receiving his or her Grade 12 high-school diploma. "Dropout" will be used synonymously for this term.

Indictable Offence: Generally, a more serious criminal charge like robbery and homicide (Yogis, 1995).

Open Custody: "A community residential centre, group home, child care institution, wilderness camp, or any other place or facility for young offenders" (YOA, R.S.C. 1985, s. Y-1, 24.1[1]).

Parens Patriae: A Latin term meaning "parent of the country," used to describe the stated philosophy of the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (Yogis, 1995).

Phase One Offender: Young Offender between 12-15 years of age.

Phase Two Offender: Young Offender between 16-18 years of age.

Recidivism: "Refers to repeat offending after being processed by the youth justice system for an earlier offence" (Bala, 1997, p. 325).

Secure Custody: "A place or facility designated for the secure containment or restraint of young offenders" (YOA, R.S.C. 1985, s. Y-1, 24.1[1]).

Summary Offence: Generally speaking, summary offences, which may be federal or provincial, are those of a less serious nature and are restricted to a maximum of six months in jail, or a $2,000 fine, or both (Jackson & Griffiths, 1991; Yogis, 1995).

Violent Incidents: "Involves offences that deal with the application, or threat of application, of force to a person. These include homicide, attempted murder, various forms of sexual and non-sexual assault, robbery and abduction" (Statistics Canada, 1996, p. 77).

Young Offender: "A person who is or, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, appears to be twelve years of age or more, but under eighteen years of age and, where the context requires, includes any person who is charged under this Act with having committed an offence while he was a young person or is found guilty of an offence under this Act" (YOA, R.S.C. 1985, s. Y-1, 2[1]).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 presents an overview of early school leaving within a Canadian context and consists of sections on (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the justification for the study, (c) deviance and the early school leaver, (d) the significance of the study, (e) general research question, (f) specific research questions, (g) definitions of terms, and (h) organization of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature examining family background, personal, school, and criminal characteristics related to early school leaving. Literature from both school-related and non-school-related studies is presented. The chapter closes with a summary.

Chapter 3 outlines this study's research design and methodology. Primary topics are (a) research design, (b) data gathering, (c) data analysis, (d) data trustworthiness, (e) ethical procedures, and (f) delimitations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings in relation to specific research question 1: What demographic and crime-related factors, if any, contributed to the participants dropping out of high school? The findings are discussed in relation to a variety of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 4 also provides the context for the study and consists of (a) an historical overview of the juvenile justice system, (b) an overview of the YOA, (c) the collective characteristics of participants, (d) the individual characteristics of participants, and (e) a summary.

Chapter 5 presents the findings in relation to specific research question 2: What family background factors, if any, contributed to the participants dropping out of high school? To relate the findings to the question, individual life stories are presented in terms of the participants' family background histories. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section uses a narrative format to describe the participants' lives. The stories reveal each participant's childhood, personality, and family environment and were compiled from institutional files and from interviews with the participants in their "natural setting." The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

Chapter 6 presents the findings in relation to specific research question 3: What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' dropping out of high school? To relate the findings to the question, individual life stories are presented in terms of the participants' educational histories. The chapter is organized into two sections and collates data from several sources. The first section uses a narrative format to describe the participants' educational background. The stories were compiled from institutional files, school records, and interviews with the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

Chapter 7 identifies and discusses themes common to the individual cases in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The chapter is organized into three sections and collates data from several sources but mostly from interview transcripts. In the first two sections, the findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical research literature. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the information presented.

An overview of the study is presented in Chapter 8. Conclusions directed at the general research question are presented. The chapter closes with several recommendations for practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter briefly reviews the existing theoretical and empirical literature on early school leaving and combines data from both school-related and non-school-related studies. The review is organized into three sections. The first section deals with studies examining the impact of family background and demographic influences on early school leaving. The second section deals with literature examining diverse student-related variables. The final section discusses studies examining the school-related causes of premature school leaving. The findings reported in the literature offered reasons why students leave school before completing their Grade 12 requirements. The research also suggested, however, that given this issue's complexity, no single influence is solely responsible for early school leaving.

Family Background and Demographic Characteristics

The family background and demographic characteristics contributing to students quitting school have been extensively studied and are well documented in the research literature. It has long been recognised that youths from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely than their more affluent peers to suffer from a wide range of problems including academic deficiencies. Connell (1994) emphasized the importance of socioeconomic status (SES) within the school context when he remarked that "children from poor families are, generally speaking, the least successful by conventional measures and the hardest to teach by traditional methods" (p. 125). The literature also showed that children who have experienced persistent or occasional poverty were far more likely to have low intelligence-quotient (IQ) test scores (e.g., Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Masten et al., 1997; Peng & Lee, 1993). Low IQ has been highly correlated with the propensity to quit school (e.g., Alexander, Eckland, & Griffin, 1976; Lloyd, 1978; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985).

Additionally, the literature suggested that individuals from low SES backgrounds were more inclined than high SES children to have early-onset conduct or behaviour problems. For example, Offord and Lipman's (1996) study, using data from the 1996 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), showed that children from low SES backgrounds were more likely than other children to be physically aggressive and to have emotional and behavioral problems. Fagan and Wexler (1987) suggested that "a complex set of influences" particularly low SES, may be responsible for aggressive behaviours in youth (p. 644). Consistent with these findings, several other studies have also reported similar results (e.g., Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Duncan et al., 1994; Farrington, 1991; Loeber, Green, Keenan, & Lahey, 1995; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Vaden, 1990; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Peng & Lee, 1993).

Egeland and Abery (1991) noted that over the past few decades, the number of children from low SES backgrounds has increased dramatically. Ross, Scott, and Kelly (1996a) supported this view, contending that poverty rates for children in Canada have steadily increased since the early 1990s. An array of factors may explain this phenomenon. Among them, demographic shifts, particularly increases in single-parent families (e.g., Huston, McLoyd, & Garcia Coll, 1994), racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., LeCompte, 1987), and low-paying jobs (e.g., Barlow, 1995; Garbarino, 1992) are likely to be responsible for this situation. Additional factors contributing to childhood poverty may include government policies affecting income distribution as well as other right-wing social reforms (e.g., Huston et al., 1994; Maynes, 1996).

Studies showed that low SES is highly correlated with the propensity to leave school early. Drawing on data from a Statistics Canada survey of consumer finances, Ross et al. (1996a) reported that twice as many poor teenagers living in poverty dropped out of high school as compared to non-poor teenagers. Supporting this position, Hahn (1987) found that economically disadvantaged or underprivileged youth were three times more likely to be early school leavers. Moreover, a longstanding body of literature has consistently cited the relationship between low SES and early school leaving (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, Horsey, 1997; Anisef & Johnson, 1993; Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Garner & Raudenbush, 1991;

Gilbert et al., 1993; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Rumberger, 1987; 1995). This large body of research leaves little doubt that low SES may alter a student's educational prospects and reduce future career opportunities.

The fixed compositional attribute of ethnic status and how it affects early school withdrawal also needs to be considered. Although the proportion of early school leavers has declined over the past few decades as a whole, a widespread gap in the rate of decline still exists between ethnic groups and the general population (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Fine, 1986; Loughrey & Harris, 1990; Rumberger, 1987, 1995; Sum & Fogg, 1996; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The North American literature suggested that ethnic minority groups, particularly students of Hispanic descent (e.g., Chicanos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans), were more inclined than the general population to have higher dropout rates (e.g., Bean & Tienda, 1990; Chavez, Edwards, & Oetting, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcik, 1992; Hammack, 1986; McMillen, Kaufman, Hausken, & Bradby, 1993; Rumberger, 1987; Schwartz, 1995; Stern, Catterall, Alhadeff, & Ash, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, 1992, 1993; Velez, 1989). Several scholars, including Rumberger (1987, 1995) and Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan (1984), reported that students from non-English speaking families were also at higher risk than other students for school failure. Correspondingly, young people from families who had immigrated to the United States were more likely than other students to drop out of school (e.g., Levin, 1989; Velez, 1989). As well, research findings showed that schools with high concentrations of ethnic minority groups had significantly higher dropout rates than other schools (e.g., Fine, 1991; McNeal, 1997a; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). However, few differences between ethnic groups exist once structural characteristics such as SES are accounted for (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Frank, 1990; Kaufman & Bradby, 1992; McMillen et al., 1993; Rumberger, 1995; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Ethnic status also affects early school leaving in Canada. The literature indicated that a disproportionate number of Canadian students with ethnic ancestry are dropping out of mainstream secondary schools. Leaving the formal educational system is still the major obstacle to financial success for many Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) people in Canada. For instance, Jewison (1995) reported that approximately 76% of students residing in the North West Territories had dropped out of school before having received their secondary school diploma. Likewise, Employment and Immigration Canada (1990b), noted that "Dropout rates are particularly high among native youth (as high as 70 per cent in some areas)" (p. 10). This is an astounding statistic, suggesting a severe problem within this section of the population. Several other Canadian studies have reported similar findings (e.g., Anisef & Johnson, 1993; Brady, 1996; Gilbert et al., 1993; Hollander & Bush, 1996).

Coupled with SES and ethnic factors, neighbourhood and community characteristics have also been linked to early school leaving. Researchers have devoted considerable attention in recent years to identifying the distal influences by which neighbourhood and community characteristics affect individual development, deviance, and early school leaving. In general, a setting's characteristics were reported to strongly influence youth because they may be "less independent and less in control of their lives" than adults (Ingram, 1993, p. 195). Urban settings, in particular, were reported to be positively associated with delinquency. For instance, in the data from the Youth in Transition studies conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, Ingram (1993) found compelling evidence suggesting that the urban environment was a very potent predictor of delinquency. Several other scholars reported that youths from high crime, socially disorganized, and poor urban neighbourhoods were more likely than other youths to drop out of school (e.g., Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Fine, 1986; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986). Likewise, student achievement may also be geographically circumscribed. For example, the *Edmonton Journal* reported that students attending schools in Edmonton's wealthier neighbourhoods scored the highest on provincial achievement tests (Barrett, 1997). Furthermore, Kohen's (1999) study relying on the NLSCY (1996) data set reported that even prior to formal education, neighbourhoods influence a child's development. Several other studies have replicated these findings, showing that schooling outcomes may be associated with the character of a neighbourhood (e.g., Dornbusch et al., 1991; Garner & Raudenbush, 1991; Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986; Vartanian & Gleason, 1999; Wagenaar, 1987; Willms, 1996; Willms & Kerckhoff, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

The weight of the evidence cited in the empirical literature clearly demonstrated that children from poor urban neighbourhoods, as indexed most often by low-income census tracts, may be at higher risk for school failure (e.g., Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson, 1996; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Radwanski, 1987; Stedman, Salganik, & Celebuski, 1988; Wilson, 1987), juvenile crime (e.g., Elliott et al., 1996; Farrington et al., 1990; Lindström, 1996; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; McDill et al., 1986; Sampson, 1987; Saner & Ellickson, 1996; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985), and social assistance (e.g., Fetler, 1989; Gilbert et al., 1993). Other studies suggested a link between social assistance and early school leaving. For example, an older study analyzing Canadian data asserted that approximately 74% of those receiving social assistance in Saskatchewan had not graduated from high school (*Star Phoenix*, cited in Radwanski, 1987). These results are similar to a finding by the Educational Testing Service (1995), which reported that roughly 50% of welfare families in the United States were headed by early school leavers. Other scholars (e.g., Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991; Gilbert, 1993; Rumberger, 1987; Stern, 1987; Wagenaar, 1987; Winters & Kickbush, 1996) supported these findings, noting that dropouts were much more inclined than those who stayed in school to become dependent on welfare and other forms of public assistance. These studies clearly demonstrated the significant economic impact of early school leaving.

Studies found that youths from neighbourhoods composed of a high percentage of adult dropouts were more likely than other youths to disengage from the school environment (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990). Likewise, studies have shown that students from neighbourhoods with a high percentage of single-parent families may be more inclined than other students to experience "social isolation" (Wilson, 1987, cited in Kohen, 1999) and to leave school early (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Fitzpatrick & Yoels, 1992; McDill et al., 1986). Other community-related factors suggested ethnic (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Fitzpatrick & Yoels, 1992) and blue-collar neighbourhoods (e.g., Ensminger et al., 1996), and neighbourhoods with high unemployment rates (e.g., Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988; Elliott et al., 1996; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Stedman et al., 1988) as correlates of, or predictors to, early school leaving. These studies leave little doubt that neighbourhood, community, and other sociocultural characteristics influence a student's educational and employment prospects.

Since the early 1980s, the proportion of single-parent families in Canada has increased precipitously, perhaps by as much as 60% (e.g., Ross, Roberts, & Scott, 1998a, 1998b). Previously, Canadian demographic data indicated that lone-parent status typically resulted from the death of a parent. Today, the major cause of lone-parent status is divorce, separation, and dissolution of a common-law relationship (e.g., Ross et al., 1998a). By any measure, children and youth from single-parent families face considerably more developmental problems compared to those faced by children from two-parent families. Carrying this notion one step further, other studies have shown that children living in single-parent families were more likely than other children to have physical and mental health problems (e.g., Blum, Boyle, & Offord, 1988; Dooley & Lipman, 1996, cited in Lefebvre & Merrigan, 1998; Judge & Benzeval, 1993; Moilanen & Rantakallio, 1988). For instance, Lipman, Offord, and Dooley (1996), using data collected from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, found that youngsters from lone-parent families, irrespective of income level, had significantly more mental health and emotional problems.

The literature has also identified family structure as an important variable in the dropout process. For example, in reviewing the literature, Radwanski (1987) noted that "family structure appears to have a considerable effect not only on the decision to drop out, but also on prior academic performance" (p. 75). Similarly, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) reported that youths from lone-parent families had twice the chance of dropping out of school compared to their counterparts in two-parent families. An array of other studies supported the notion that early school leavers were much more prone than school stayers to come from single-parent families (e.g., Anisef & Johnson, 1993; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gilbert et al., 1993; Hahn, 1987; Lipman et al., 1996; McNeal, 1995; Natriello et al., 1990; Rumberger, 1983, 1987, 1995; Sandefur, McLanahan, & Wojtkiewicz, 1992; Stedman et al., 1988; Sullivan, 1988; Wagner, 1991a; Zimiles & Lee, 1991) and step-families (e.g., Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Sandefur et al., 1992).

In one of the earliest studies to do so, Blau and Duncan (1967) used a national representative data source. They reported that children, particularly males, from single-parent families completed fewer years of formal education than children from two-parent families. Butlin (1999), relying on the SLF (1995) data set, provided yet another viewpoint on family structure, noting that "high school graduates from two-parent families were more likely (44%) to attend university compared to students from lone-parent families (35%)" (p. 23). Other studies suggested a strong relationship between single-parent status and financial difficulties or poverty. For instance, Ross et al. (1996a), drawing on data prepared by the Centre for International Statistics, noted that 76% of single mothers in Canada with children under age 7 were living in poverty. Various studies (e.g., Duncan & Hoffman, 1985; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Lefebvre & Merrigan, 1998; McLanahan, 1985; Ross et al., 1996a; Zick & Smith, 1988) have also suggested that single-parent status and poverty may be related. By the same token, Ross, Shillington, and Lochhead (1994) pointed out that 50% of poor single mothers in Canada had not completed high school. Clearly, the twin aspects of poverty and single-parent status have several life-course and educational implications for children.

Research has shown a consistent relationship between disrupted families and childhood aggression or behavioural problems (e.g., Lipman et al., 1996; Ross et al., 1998a), and also a relationship between disrupted families and juvenile delinquency (e.g., Chilton & Markle, 1972; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Gove & Crutchfield, 1982). Increasing evidence also revealed a positive correlation between disrupted families and adolescent psychopathy (e.g., Blum et al., 1988; Wadsworth, Burnell, Taylor, & Butler, 1985), including substance abuse (e.g., Doherty & Needle, 1991; Jenkins & Zunguze, 1998; Needle, Su, & Doherty, 1990). For this study, "psychopathy" was defined as a debilitating mental disorder such as schizophrenia or depression. Some investigators have found a positive correlation between single-parent status and low scores on IQ or teacher-constructed tests (e.g., Blum et al., 1988; Dooley & Lipman, 1996, cited in Lefebvre & Merrigan, 1998; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). However, Ross et al. (1998a), in summing up their research on diminished developmental outcomes of children, concluded that "these results do not mean that lone-parenthood per sé is the main factor; rather, there is," they elaborated, "most likely a constellation of factors strongly associated with lone parenthood" (p. iii).

In addition to the family background and demographic dimensions noted above, early school leavers are also more likely to be male (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Bickel, 1989; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Fine, 1991; Gilbert et al., 1993; Janosz et al., 1997; McNeal, 1995; Rumberger, 1987; Spain & Sharpe, 1990) and to live in large families with several natural or step-siblings (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Barro & Kolstad, 1987; Davies, 1994; Frank, 1987a; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Larsen & Shertzer, 1987; Natriello et al., 1990; Pawlovich, 1984). Family size has been seen to have a profound influence on verbal ability (e.g., Willms, 1996) and on general student achievement (e.g., Hanushek, 1992). Studies showed that dropouts were more inclined to come from families with other sibling dropouts (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988). Attention has also been devoted to the dual aspects of family size and sibling delinquency. Earlier research by Andrews (1976), Hirschi (1969), and Robins, West, and Herjanic (1975) suggested a positive correlation between family size and childhood delinquency, as has subsequent research (e.g., Brownfield & Sorenson, 1994; LeFlore, 1988; Hirschi, 1991; Morash & Rucker, 1989; Myers, Milne, Baker, & Ginsburg, 1987; Rosen, 1985; Tygart, 1991; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). However, not everyone agrees that family size necessarily contributes to childhood delinquency. For instance, Figueira-McDonough's (1993) study relying on census data from a major urban area in Arizona found that the delinquency rates were associated with a lower proportion of children per household. Despite the findings of Figueira-McDonough's study, however, several theories and explanations have been advanced to explain the connection between family size and delinquency. In general, it has been postulated that large families may harm children's intellectual growth because of economic and parental time constraints (e.g., Hirschi, 1991; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985).

Early school leavers are also more likely than school stayers to report marital plans or take on adult roles prematurely (e.g., Barber & McClellan, 1987; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fine, 1991; Grayson & Hall, 1993; Mann, 1986; Pallas, 1987; SLS, 1991). Studies also showed that for females, pregnancy may be a strong predictor of early attrition (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fine, 1991; Hahn, 1987; Hammack, 1986; Kenney, 1987; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Mann, 1986; Pittman, 1986; Ruby & Law, 1987; Steele, 1992; Tidwell, 1988). In this context, females tend to assume more family obligations than males, regardless of ethnic background, thus increasing the difficulty of maintaining anything approaching an adequate grade point average (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985). In support of early autonomy's harmful effects, Howell and Frese (1982) remarked that "early entry into the role of parent or spouse, for instance, is synchronized with other role transitions that compete with school--normally the central activity during adolescence" (p. 52). Velez (1989) reached the same conclusion, noting that youths who take on adult roles prematurely are, in general, less committed to school. Other research studies examining the effects of early transition to adult status suggested that adolescent deviance (e.g., Dornbusch et al., 1985) and economic instability may also be associated with such practices. Beyond these factors, early school leavers may be less likely to be attached to their parents, (e.g., Fagan & Pabon, 1990) and more likely to be highly mobile or homeless (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Frank, 1990; Masten et al., 1997; Pittman, 1991).

Research also pointed to a link between the number of residential or geographic moves and dropping out of school (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Haveman et al., 1991). Likewise, Velez (1989), using longitudinal data from the sophomore cohort of the High School and Beyond study, noted that "residential mobility also has a negative impact on the amount of 'social' capital available outside the family, that is, parents' relations with the institutions of the community, networking with other parents, and access to channels of information" (p. 121). Other studies affirmed that high mobility may be linked to both higher rates of delinquency (e.g., Figueira-McDonough, 1993), behavioral problems (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wood, Halfon, Scarla, Newacheck, & Nessim, 1993), and births out of wedlock, all of which intrinsically affect one's decision to stay in school (e.g., Chong-Bum, Haveman, & Wolfe, 1991).

Similarly, school mobility may also be an important demographic marker in the dropout process. Early research by Pawlovich (1984) and Stroup and Robins (1972) concluded that the number of elementary schools attended differentiated those students who quit school from those who graduated. More recently, Rumberger's (1995) study using data from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Survey found compelling evidence that changing schools was, in fact, highly correlated with the propensity to quit. Specifically, he found that "each time a student changed schools, the odds of dropping out increased by 30%" (p. 604). Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey for the period from 1988 to 1994, Rumberger and Larson (1998) reported that just over 23% of all students who changed schools two or more times between Grade 8 and Grade 12 did not graduate from high school. Likewise, Vail (1996), relying on American data from the General Accounting Office, noted that students who frequently changed schools were more likely than other students to have both repeated a grade and experienced problems in core subjects such as English and mathematics. Other scholars reported that students who frequently changed schools were more inclined to drop out of school (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Alspaugh, 1999; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Fine, 1991; Hess, 1986; Wood et al., 1993; Worrell, 1997). In summing up the research on mobility, Alexander et al. (1997) asserted that "the safest conclusion is that such uprooting experiences at the time of the beginning school transition are generally hard on children" (p. 95).

Proximal factors such as parental influences also appear to influence one's decision to leave school. Parents of dropouts, more often than not, have low educational attainment and may be dropouts themselves (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Grossnickle, 1986; Hammack, 1986; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Ruby & Law, 1987; Rumberger, 1987; Self, 1985). This factor is significant because the amount of education--particularly the mother's education--has been associated with low SES (e.g., Kortering, Haring, & Klockars, 1992; Rumberger, 1983) and poor school performance of children (e.g., Tidwell, 1988). Research has consistently demonstrated that the parents' educational attainment, regardless of ethnic background, is a robust predictor of the offsprings' dropout behaviour. For example, one longitudinal early school leaving study of 1,242 Black first-graders from an urban community in Chicago reported that maternal graduation directly affected the odds of the offspring dropping out of school (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Correspondingly, de Brouker and Lavallée (1998), drawing on data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) for Canada conducted among 5,660 individuals in 1994, found that "young adults aged 26 to 35 whose parents did not complete high school have one less year of schooling than those whose parents graduated from high school" (p. 26). Many other studies supported the findings noted above (e.g., Bryk & Thum, 1989; Davies, 1994; Denton & Hunter, 1991; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Frank, 1990; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Gilbert et al., 1993; Grayson & Hall, 1993; Janosz et al., 1997; LeBlanc, Vallières, & McDuff, 1992; Rumberger et al., 1990; Wagner, 1991a).

Other studies affirmed the link between low parental educational attainment and offsprings' juvenile delinquency (e.g., Jenkins, 1995). Further, researchers have shown a relationship between parents' education and adolescent IQ test scores (e.g., Natriello et al., 1990). Findings also showed that parents of dropouts valued education less (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Okey & Cusick, 1995) and were less involved with their children's education than were parents of non-dropouts (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Gough, 1991; Jenkins, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

Parents of dropouts also were more likely to be unemployed (e.g., Fine, 1991; Hammack, 1986; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Mann, 1986; Peng & Takai, 1983) or employed in blue-collar or semi-skilled occupations (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Denton & Hunter, 1991; Gilbert et al, 1993; Stallman, Mwachofi, Flora, & Johnson, 1991; Pawlovich, 1984; Wright, 1985). This finding suggests that youths from working-class families are much more prone than youths from other families to leave school before graduation. Additionally, parents of early school leavers tended more than other parents to have permissive parenting styles (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Ekstrome et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; McCombs & Forehand, 1989; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Dornbusch, & Ritter, 1988; Rumberger et al., 1990), to provide less supervision (e.g., Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Janosz et al., 1997; Rumberger, 1995), and to use more aversive or negative sanctions against their children (e.g., Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Rumberger et al., 1990). Finally, parents of dropouts were more prone than other parents to have lower educational expectations for their children (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Rumberger, 1995; Sandefur et al., 1992) and to let their children make their own decisions (e.g., Rumberger et al., 1990).

Fagan and Wexler (1987), in explicating the contemporary theories of youth violence, noted that the "family plays an active role in socializing youths to violent behaviours through supervision and discipline practices and modeling and reinforcement of antisocial behaviours" (p. 643). Further, Haveman and Wolf (1995) noted that events such as parental criminality are viewed as creating emotional instabilities that hamper normal childhood development. A sizeable body of research demonstrated the connection between ineffective rearing of children and their later criminality (e.g., Farrington, Ohlin, & Wilson, 1986; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Patterson, 1995, 1996; Patterson & Dishion, 1985; Snyder & Patterson, 1995). A variety of evidence also pointed to a strong connection between parental and adolescent substance abuse (e.g., Baumrind, 1985; Brook, Brook, Gordon, Whiteman, & Cohen, 1990; Goodwin, 1985; McDermott, 1984; Okey & Cusick, 1995). In summing up the research on parenting style, Rumberger (1995) concluded that "students develop more psychosocial maturity and do better in school when they come from families in which parents monitor and regulate their children's activities at the same time that they provide emotional support" (p. 587).

Personal Characteristics

It has been found that early school leavers are more likely than other students to suffer from behavioural and emotional problems. The consensus in the literature was that students with severe emotional problems have reduced educational prospects. For example, Rylance (1997), found that almost 50% of a national sample of students identified as having severe emotional and mental health problems dropped out of school before having obtained their secondary school diploma. Many other scholars (e.g., Kortering & Blackorby, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Rumberger, 1987; Valdes, Williamson, & Wagner, 1990) have reported similar findings. These studies certainly underscore the significance of mental health issues and how they may be related to early school leaving.

Students with behavioural problems were also the focus of yet another body of research related to early school leaving. In general, this research suggested that early school leavers were much more likely to experience antisocial personality disorders (e.g., Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger et al., 1990; Thornberry et al., 1985; Tidwell, 1988) as well as early-onset conduct disorders (e.g., Bierman, Smoot, & Aumiller, 1993; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Farmer, 1995; Fergusson & Horwood, 1998; Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990). In the same way, children with early-onset conduct problems were more likely to become delinquent in later life (e.g., Farrington et al., 1990; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1998; Loeber, 1991; Offord & Bennett, 1994; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985) and suffer from a wide range of other problems including substance abuse (e.g., Fergusson & Lynskey, 1998; Offord & Bennett, 1994; Offord et al., 1992; Robins & Price, 1991), suicidal thoughts (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989a; Plutchik & van Praag, 1997), and psychological depression (e.g., Zoccolillo, 1992).

The literature also suggested a link between confrontation with authority figures and dropping out of school (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Velez, 1989). Similarly, students who had been involved with the police or the youth justice system were more likely than other students to discontinue school. For example, Gastright and Ahmad (1988), using data from a large American urban district, noted that 36% of early school leavers reported having been being arrested by police. In a study of 162 Canadian high school dropouts, Hartnagel and Krahn (1989) found that 31% of the respondents recalled being questioned by police within the previous year. Other studies have shown that delinquency was highly correlated with the tendency to leave school early (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997; Natriello, 1984; Pallas, 1987; Stedman et al., 1988; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Indeed, the literature suggested that early school leavers were more apt than school stayers to be incarcerated. For example, in a study of more than 1,000 American adult male offenders, Bell, Conrad, and Suppa (1984) found that "most" of their participants had dropped out of school shortly after Grade 10. Supporting this position, the Educational Testing Service (1995) reported that approximately 50% of American inmates were, in fact, high school dropouts.

In addition to the personal factors noted above, the dropout was also more likely than the school stayer to have low self-esteem (e.g., DeBlois, 1989; Edmonton Public Schools, 1988; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1989; Karp, 1988; Radwanski 1987; Sandefur et al., 1992; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and to be controlled by external forces such as peer-group pressure (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Pugh, 1986; Hallinan & Williams, 1990; Leaseberg, Kaplan, & Sadock, 1990; Rumberger, 1987). As well, the early school leaver was more inclined to associate with dropout friends (e.g., Alpert & Dunhan, 1986; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Davies, 1994; Dunham & Alpert, 1987; Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Finan, 1991; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Ruby & Law, 1987) and deviant friends (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Cairns et al., 1989; Claes & Simard, 1992; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997; Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990; Pittman, 1991). Other personal factors contributing to early school leaving included substance abuse (e.g., Bosma, 1988; Bray, Zarkin, Ringwalt, & Qi, 2000; Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ellickson, Bui, Bell, & McGuigan, 1998; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Franklin, 1989; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Guagliardo, Huang, Hicks, & D'Angelo, 1998; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Velez, 1989; Wichstrom, 1998), and problems with the management of stress, particularly family stress (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Frank, 1987b, 1990).

In the context of premature school leaving, another factor that has received considerable attention is youth employment. However, evidence is mixed regarding its costs and benefits. On the one hand, research has shown a strong correlation between working for money and dropping out of school. For example, Jordan and his colleagues (1996), using data collected from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS, 1988), found that employment during school was related to disengagement from school. The study revealed that 35% of the dropout respondents reported that they had left school because they were either seeking employment or had found employment. Numerous other studies also provided a variety of evidence to illustrate the relationship between employment during high school and poor school performance or dropping out of school (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Grayson & Hall, 1993; Mann, 1986; Marsh, 1991;

Pallas, 1984, cited in McDill et al., 1985; Radwanski, 1987; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). On the other hand, a variety of other studies also reported favourable effects of youth employment during high school. For example, Greenberger and Steinberg's (1981) study of the "naturally occurring" employment of youths in four California high schools found that employment had several beneficial effects including increased punctuality and responsibility. This study also supported more recent studies on the favourable effects of youth employment (e.g., Carr, Wright, & Brody, 1996; Barton, 1989; Green, 1990; Holland & Andre, 1987; Hotchkiss, 1986).

Statistics Canada (1994) reported that, on average, Canadian high school students work approximately 14 hours per week. Clearly, working for money is widespread and common among Canadian youth. However, despite this well-accepted activity, the literature suggested that working more than 15 hours per week may be cause for concern (e.g., Finch & Mortimer, 1985; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Mann, 1986; Meyer, 1987; Orr, 1987; Radwanski, 1987; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991; Stern, Stone, Hopkins, & McMillion, 1990; Sunter, 1993). Other research demonstrated that working excessive hours during high school was also likely to lower the odds of attending a postsecondary institution. For instance, Butlin (1999), relying on the SLF (1995) data set, reported that more high school students who worked "less than 20 hours per week or did not work during their last year of high school attended university (around 45%) than was the case for students who worked more than 20 hours per week (27%)" (p. 30).

Finally, the literature suggested that early school leavers were less likely than other students to have participated in extracurricular or other school activities. McNeal (1995) concluded that participation in extracurricular activities significantly reduced the likelihood of leaving school early. According to McNeal's path analysis model, students who participated in athletics were 1.7 times less likely to leave school early (when all other factors were constant) as compared to those who did not participate in athletics. Other investigators shared this view. For example, Ekstrom and her colleagues (1986), using longitudinal data from the sophomore cohort of the *High School and Beyond* study, noted that dropouts reported lower participation rates in extracurricular athletics than stayers. The 1991 SLS study replicated these results in Canada, reporting that 50% of the national dropout sample had not participated in extracurricular or other school-related activities (Sunter, 1993).

Multiple studies also provided considerable evidence to support the association between extracurricular participation and early school leaving (e.g., Coleman, 1993; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1989; Gilbert et al., 1993; Karp,1988; Natriello, 1984; Pittman, 1991; Reddick & Peach, 1990; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Soderberg, 1988; Tidwell, 1988) or suggested that participation in extracurricular activities may also lower delinquency rates. Early work by Landers and Landers (1978) and Schafer (1969, 1972) found persuasive evidence that participation in extracurricular school activities was correlated with lower delinquency rates. Subsequent research has supported this finding. For instance, in a study of 500 male adolescents, Holland and Andre (1987) reported that participation in extracurricular and athletic activities significantly lowered delinquency rates. Furthermore, extracurricular participation, as described in the literature, has been shown to have an array of other beneficial effects on youths, including increased involvement in social activities (e.g., Hanks, 1981; Holland & Andre, 1987; Lindsay, 1984), improved self-esteem (e.g., Crain, Mahard, & Narat, 1982; Grabe, 1981; Holland & Andre, 1987), higher educational attainment (e.g., Dowell, Badgett, & Hunkler, 1972; Hanks & Eckland, 1976; Holland & Andre, 1987; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973), and increased postsecondary participation (e.g., Butlin, 1999).

School-Related Characteristics

Although family background, demographic, and personal characteristics are integral components of the dropout equation and exert powerful influences on young people, school-related characteristics are also important factors. McNeal (1997a) provided the rationale for their inclusion of these components in the discussion, suggesting that "evidence indicates that the school is an important piece of the dropout mosaic" (p. 210). Gilbert et al. (1993) also dealt with the school experience. In summing up the results based on the national SLS (1991) study, these researchers concluded that "better knowledge of how students interact with the school environment should increase understanding of the practices and policies that could be implemented to encourage students to remain in school until graduation" (p. 33).

Problems related to school attrition have existed for many years. Concern about high school dropouts began to appear in the education literature as early as the 1950s (Pawlovich, 1984) and has continued into the present. At first, the explanation given for students leaving high school tended to identify family background and personal characteristics (e.g., Pawlovich, 1984; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). However, more recent research has suggested that the reasons for leaving school may have changed with time. For example, Jordan et al. (1996) contended that "the most frequently cited reasons offered by dropouts for leaving school were related to contextual factors within the school itself, as opposed to external influences" (p. 69).

Previous studies supported this conclusion. Radwanski (1987) found that 43% of his sample of Ontario dropouts attributed their decision to drop out to school-related reasons, compared to the 23% who emphasized personal reasons. An additional body of research also found that dropouts most often cited school-related factors (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Jordan et al., 1996; Mann, 1986; Pawlovich, 1984, 1985; Rumberger, 1987; Sharman, 1990; Tanner, 1990; Tanner, Krahn, & Hartnagel, 1995; Tidwell, 1988; Wehlage et al., 1990). This finding indicates that the current dropout problem exists not only because of family background or personal characteristics, but also because of what happens when students attend school.

In the context of school-related factors, the typical dropout has several attributes that are easy to itemize. Before making a formal withdrawal or exit, dropouts characteristically perceive the school environment as an undesirable and uninviting place. For instance, Jordan et al. (1996), drawing on American data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (1988), found that 51% of respondent dropouts indicated that they simply "didn't like school" (p. 70). Other studies supported the association between disliking school and dropping out (e.g., Bowditch, 1993; Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Dunham & Alpert, 1987; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fine, 1986; Smith, 1986; Tidwell, 1988). Dropouts also reported a negative attitude towards school (e.g., Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Smith, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), as well as a feeling of general dissatisfaction (Alexander et al., 1976; Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Barber & McClellan, 1987; Ekstrom et al., 1986).

Other studies cited problematic school behaviour such as showing up late for class (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Ekstrom et al., 1986) or skipping class altogether (e.g., Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Coleman, 1993; deBettencourt & Zigmond, 1990; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Ensminger & Slusacick, 1992; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Gilbert et al., 1993; Lee & Burkam, 1992; McAlpine, 1992; McDill et al., 1985; Natriello, 1986; Norris, 1993; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990; Wagner, 1991b). In a sample of 651 Wisconsin high school students, Barrington and Hendricks (1989) found a strong association between truancy and dropping out of school. They used permanent school records to collect data on student absences in Grades 1 to 12. The study revealed that dropouts had significantly more absences for all grade levels except Grade 1. With respect to Grades 5 and 9, dropouts had, respectively, two times and three times more absences than school stayers. Velez (1989) replicated these results, using the High School and Beyond (HSB) American data set. This national longitudinal study of U.S. high schools conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that "the more days a student missed school without a valid reason, the more likely he or she was to drop out" (p. 124). Likewise, the Edmonton Public Schools District (1988) noted that poor attendance was strongly associated with dropping out of school. According to Winters and Kickbush (1996), skipping class was one of the first signs that students were in trouble and losing their way academically. Similarly, Bryk and Thum (1989) noted that truancy was one of the strongest predictors of premature school leaving. Further, Claes and Simard (1992) and Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1987) suggested a connection between truancy and delinquency. Winters and Kickbush (1996), relying on data from a Los Angeles County Office of Education study, similarly affirmed that "truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior" (p. 1).

In general, the literature supported the idea that truancy and discipline problems may be shared risk characteristics for dropping out of school (e.g., Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; deBettencourt & Zigmond, 1990; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusacick, 1992; Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Lee & Burkam, 1992; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; McDill et al., 1985; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Rumberger, 1987, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990). The literature also showed that students who quit school were more apt than other students to exhibit disruptive behaviour in class (e.g., Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Davies, 1994; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Lee & Burkam, 1992; Natriello, 1984; Rumberger, 1987, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990; Wagner, 1991b; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), particularly early aggressive behaviour (e.g., Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns et al., 1989; Ensminger et al., 1996; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). More precisely, early school leavers, in comparison to stayers, tended to accumulate significantly more suspensions and expulsions. The early studies of Cottle (1975) and Rumberger (1981) and the later ones of Binkley and Hooper (1989), Ekstrom et al. (1986), Fine (1991), Gastright and Ahmad (1988), Jordan et al. (1996), Kronick and Hargis (1998), Okey and Cusick (1995), and Velez (1989) clearly showed that suspensions and expulsions highly correlated with the propensity to leave school early. Besides these factors, dropouts were usually below grade level for their age (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Janosz et al., 1997; Kaufman et al., 1992; Strother, 1986; Velez, 1989) and often felt isolated and alienated from teachers, peers, and the curriculum (e.g., Banks, 1988; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Finn, 1989; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Quirouette, Saint-Denis, & Huot, 1990; Radwanski, 1987), particularly during the transitional period between elementary and high school (e.g., Popp, 1991).

Another area of research associated with student isolation and alienation is the structural concept of pupil/teacher ratio (P/T ratio). McNeal (1997a) emphasized the importance of class size in the dropout equation, pointing out that "larger P/T ratios may increase the student's likelihood of dropping out by decreasing the number of interactions between pupils and teachers, thereby increasing the level of isolation and alienation" (p. 214). From a different viewpoint, Bickel and Lange (1995) reported that school districts with relatively high P/T ratios tended to have statistically significant lower post secondary enrollment rates. Overall, however, evidence was mixed regarding the association between class size and dropping out of high school. Several studies reported that high pupil/teacher ratios significantly affected school attrition rates (e.g., Larter & Eason, 1978; McNeal, 1997a), but other studies reported no marked difference in withdrawal statistics (e.g., Bryk & Thum, 1989).

In identifying the school-related reasons for dropping out, much emphasis has been placed on the construct of "boredom." One prime reason offered by students for leaving school early was related to boredom with the classroom or school routine (e.g., Barber & McClellan, 1987; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Tidwell, 1988). According to the SLS (1991) study, boredom and disliking school were common reasons for quitting. More precisely, 22% of females and 18% of males reported boredom as their main reason for dropping out of school. Radwanski (1987) uncovered a similar pattern by observing that boredom was mentioned more often than difficulty with course work.

In the present context, however, one needs to approach the construct of "boredom" with a degree of caution. Many respondents may have chosen socially acceptable or less harsh terms, such as "boredom," rather than responding with a self-degrading, but truthful answer, such as "limited scholastic ability." The construct of "boredom" has also been an area of research interest for criminologists. The research was consistent with the theory that young offenders, particularly young offenders from low

SES backgrounds, were more likely than nondelinquents to experience boredom to a greater extent. While a considerable and longstanding body of research was consistent with this supposition (e.g., Banfield, 1968; Brownfield & Sorenson, 1993; Landau, 1976; Nettler, 1984), this research was less clear on the underlying mechanisms, processes, and causal factors.

Low academic achievement, variously defined, also appeared to expose young people to a greater number of individual risks including criminality, academic disengagement, and early school leaving. Recent studies have consistently shown that early school leavers were more prone than school stayers to experience academic achievement problems in school (e.g., Alexander, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusacick, 1992; Gilbert et al., 1993; Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Janosz et al., 1997; Jordan et al., 1996; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1995; Pittman, 1991; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990; Stedman et al., 1988). Specifically, the literature suggested that students experiencing difficulties within the school setting were more inclined than other students to expend relatively little effort (eg., Davies, 1994), complete fewer homework assignments (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Lee & Burkam, 1992; Rumberger, 1995), acquire fewer school credits (e.g., Waterhouse, 1990), read below grade level (e.g., Grossnickle, 1986; Hess, 1987; Quay & Allen, 1982; Self, 1985; Smith, 1986; Soderberg, 1988), and, in general, have lower educational aspirations (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), though other reasons for experiencing difficulties certainly exist.

Another body of research showed that dropouts acquired lower grades than school graduates. Hahn (1987) found that students who had received low marks and failed a grade were four times more likely than other students to drop out of school. Similarly, Ekstrom et al. (1986), using longitudinal data from the sophomore cohort of the High School and Beyond national study, reported a correlation of one standard deviation between dropout and nondropout grades. That is, dropouts reported grades of mostly C's compared to stayers, who received grades of mostly B's. Similarly, Ensminger and Slusarcick (1992) reported that males receiving high marks in the first grade had more than twice the chance of graduating from school than those with low marks. Several other studies have also shown that poor grades were correlated with the propensity to leave school early (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Cairns et al., 1989; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Janosz et al., 1997; Waterhouse, 1990).

Students with poor grades were also highly correlated with the propensity to engage in delinquent behaviours. For example, in a study of 1,637 Mexican-American and caucasian non-Hispanic dropouts, Chavez, Oetting, and Swaim (1994) found that students with poor grades were far more likely than other students to engage in criminal activity. Other studies have also reported an association between delinquency and poor school performance (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987). Further, research has shown that poor school performance was positively correlated to later adult offender status. For example, in a normative sample of 458 French-speaking Montreal males, LeBlanc, Vallières, and McDuff (1993) found a strong association between school performance and adult criminality. Initial self-administered questionnaires were completed at an average age of 14 and readministered at an average age of 16. Subsequent interviews indicated that 33% of the subjects reported committing at least one *Canadian Criminal Code* Offence between the ages of 18 and 30.

Grade failure has also been linked to dropping out; for example, Radwanski (1987), relying on data from the Goldfarb study, noted that "82 per cent of dropouts report having failed at least one subject while in high school" (p. 78). Similarly, Barrington and Hendricks' (1989) study revealed that dropouts, in comparison to graduates, received significantly more failing grades at all grade levels. Dauber, Alexander, and Entwisle (1993) supported this hypothesis further, contending that academic deficiencies were, in fact, significantly associated with grade failure. Rumberger (1995) suggested that grade retention was the single most important school-related predictor of early school leaving. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey, Rumberger (1995) found compelling evidence suggesting that grade retention was highly correlated with the propensity to drop out of school. More precisely, the study revealed that "students who were held back in school had 6 times the odds of dropping out" (p. 606) compared to other students. Hahn (1987) reported comparable findings, contending that students who were held back in school had roughly 4 times the probability of dropping out as compared to those students who were not held back. Other studies also affirmed a positive relationship between grade retention and dropping out of school (e.g., Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco, 1989; Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Hammack, 1986; Janosz et al., 1997; Lee & Burkam, 1992; Roderick, 1993; Smith, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), particularly for those students failing the later grades. For example, Kaufman and Bradley (1992) found that students who failed the upper grades were far more likely to drop out of school compared to their junior counterparts. Therefore, with respect to dropping out of school, grade retention may not be equally consequential across all grade levels.

Dropouts, as described in the literature, were generally seen as students who had experienced many difficulties in learning, particularly in core high school subjects. Developmentally, the dropout was seen as a student who had experienced difficulties in learning and adjusting from elementary to secondary school (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Finn, 1993; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Rumberger, 1995), and who had often experienced academic failures or disengagement in subjects such as mathematics and English (e.g., Dauber et al., 1993; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Ensminger et al., 1996; Gilbert et al., 1993; Karp, 1988; Rumberger et al., 1990; Schwartz, 1995). For example, Gastright and Ahmad (1988), using data from a large American urban district, reported that 74% of early school leavers had failed English in the year prior to quitting school. Alexander et al. (1997) emphasized the importance of students doing well in the core subjects, pointing out that mathematics and English were the "foundation of virtually all other later learning, so to fall behind academically at the start in these subjects ought to cast a long shadow on a child's life" (p. 90). Butlin's (1999) study supported this specialized perspective, concluding that students with problems in either mathematics or English were far less likely than other students to attend a postsecondary institution. Other research noted that poor academic performance and lack of parental involvement in the child's schooling were positively related (e.g., Fehrmann et al., 1987; Myers et al., 1987). Overall, a mismatch seems to have existed between the student with limited scholastic ability and the high school setting. For many students, this mismatch manifested itself as disruptive and deviant behaviour that inevitably challenged the teacher's authority. An additional consequence of cessation of academic effort or limited scholastic ability may be consignment to a vocational or basic stream upon Grade 8 graduation.

The practice of academic streaming or tracking has also been linked to early school leaving and has received considerable attention. For example, Edmonton Public Schools' (1996) analysis of the characteristics and causes of dropouts in Alberta schools reported that 29% of dropouts were in the academic stream as compared to 51% in the vocational stream. Echoing these findings, Radwanski (1987) noted that only 12% of the students in the academic stream left high school before graduation, as compared to 62% and 79% in the general and basic streams, respectively. Further supporting the connection between streaming and dropping out, Karp (1988) and Quirouette et al. (1990) pointed out that streaming might significantly affect a student's educational prospects. Other studies suggested that streaming tended to have a negative effect on student learning (e.g., Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Holmes, 1990) and may have been correlated with other social factors such as delinquency (e.g., Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; Oakes, 1985) and low SES (e.g., Curtis, Livingston, & Smaller, 1992; Hoffer, Rasinski, & Moore, 1995; Radwanski, 1987). Overall, studies from a variety of research traditions have repeatedly demonstrated that consignment to a nonacademic curriculum significantly increased a student's propensity to leave school early (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Davies, 1994; Denton & Hunter, 1991; Fine, 1991; Frase, 1989; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; King, Warren, Michalski, & Peart, 1988; Ministry of Citizenship, 1989; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Pallas, 1987; Parkin, 1989; Pollard, 1989; Quirouette, Sanin-Denis, & Hout, 1989).

Another perspective on dropping out emphasized institutional academic standards. In general, school-reform policies have been reported to include five broad types of standards. These included (a) a more difficult and demanding curriculum including additional courses in science and math; (b) more demanding time requirements in the form of longer school days and weeks; (c) higher standards for school achievement, particularly on standardized tests; (d) more demanding requirements for homework; and (e) more rigid attendance and disciplinary policies (McDill et al., 1985). However, evidence was mixed regarding the link between institutional academic standards and early school leaving. Several studies suggested that increasing the overall emphasis on school reform policies would reduce the dropout rate (e.g., Bryk & Thum, 1989; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Radwanski, 1987) while other studies suggested the opposite effect (e.g., Barber & McClellan, 1987; Hess, 1986; McDill et al., 1985, 1986; McNeal, 1997a; Tanner, 1989), "particularly if schools had not implemented other organizational and instructional changes" (Finn, 1989, p. 117).

Other research supported the assertion that institutional climate may influence student behaviour (e.g., Weishew & Peng, 1993) and school-completion rates (e.g., Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). More precisely, this research concluded that a negative student-teacher relationship may significantly affect a youth's educational prospects. In a study designed to evaluate the concept of school climate, Birch and Ladd (1997) reported negative student-teacher relationships to be a strong correlate in a wide range of adverse outcomes including school-adjustment problems, poor academic performance, aggressiveness, and negative school attitudes. Several other scholars' findings (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1986; Kaufman & Bradley, 1992; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Pianta, 1994; Pianta & Steinberg, 1993; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995) supported

Birch and Ladd's study. Clearly, teachers and administrators may exhibit a like or dislike for certain students. For example, students labelled with the stigma of "young offenders" may not be particularly wanted or recruited by certain schools. Consequently, these students face an uphill battle for administrative acceptance and may be encouraged to leave school by what DeRidder (1990) called "orderly withdrawal." Pestello (1989), summarized the research on school-completion rates and student-teacher relationships by observing, "teachers come to define some students negatively and others positively. An important element in this identification process," he elaborated, "is an individual's past behavior" (p. 296). Without doubt, teachers and administrators play an integral part in a student's commitment to schooling.

Conceptual Framework of the Factors Affecting Early School Leaving

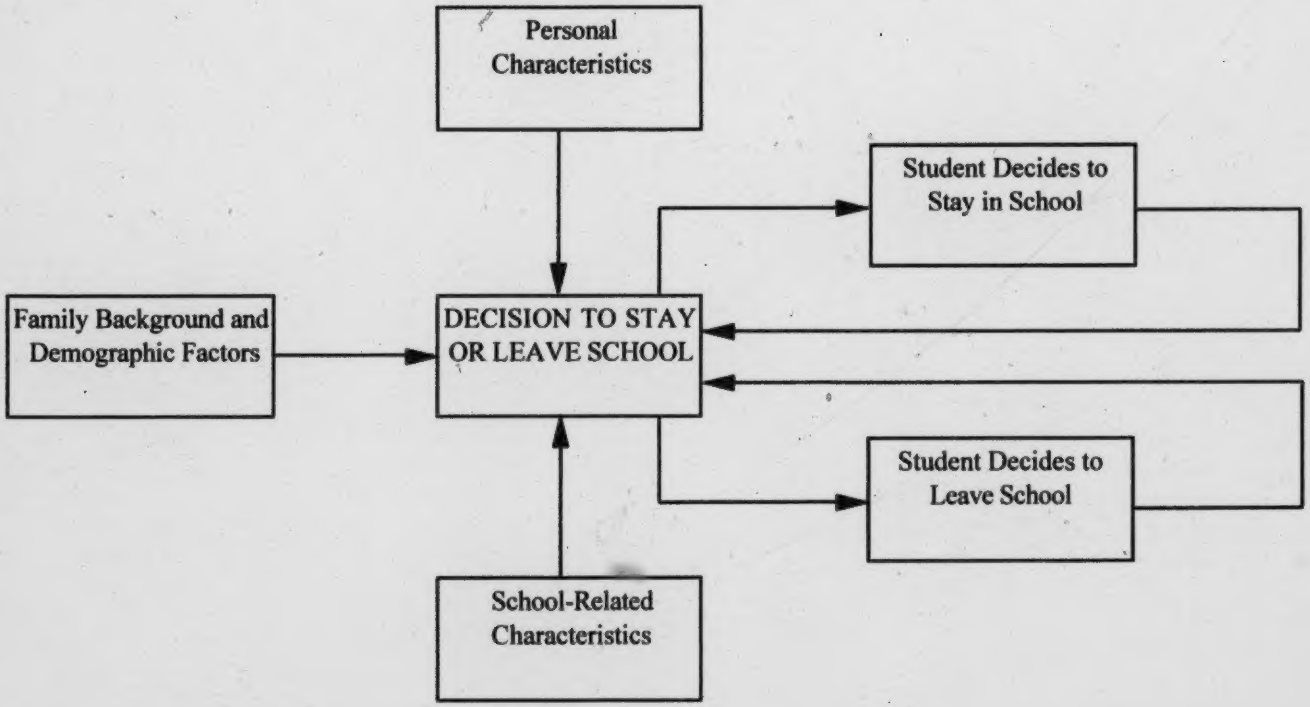
From the review of the literature, a conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) was developed illustrating the factors affecting early school leaving: (a) family background and demographic characteristics, (b) personal characteristics, and (c) school-related characteristics. This framework postulates that these three factors are integral in the dropout process. Furthermore, it is proposed that the decision to stay in school or to drop out of school is reevaluated repeatedly by the individual. The model assumes no priority ranking among characteristics but hypothesizes that a variety of factors including personal, social, situational, structural, and contextual influences, which are both proximal and distal to the school setting, can lead to early school leaving.

Summary

This review provided a basis for understanding the controversies and perspectives related to the school-dropout problem. The literature suggested a constellation of specific factors contributing to students dropping out of school. These factors were grouped into three broad categories: family background and demographic-related factors, personal characteristics, and school-related variables. Several aspects contributing to students quitting school were extensively studied in the research literature while others were not. Early school leavers come from a cross-section of society; thus, any attempt to

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework of the Factors Affecting Early School Leaving


Personal Characteristics
Family Background and Demographic Factors
DECISION TO STAY OR LEAVE SCHOOL
School-Related Characteristics
Student Decides to Stay in School
Student Decides to Leave School

stereotype dropouts would be misleading. A review of mainly Canadian and American research literature suggested, however, that these youths have common attributes.

With regard to family background and demographics, socioeconomic and ethnic factors were found to be highly predictive of dropout behaviour. In fact, these two characteristics may be the factors most strongly related to early attrition. Other family background and demographic factors related to dropping out of school included neighbourhood and community influences, family structure, being male and living in a large family, moving away from home at an early age and taking on adult responsibilities prematurely, moving often and changing schools frequently, having parents who were dropouts themselves, having parents with ineffective child-rearing skills, and having parents who were criminals or substance abusers.

Personal characteristics related to early school leaving form the second set of factors. The literature strongly suggested that antisocial and early-onset conduct disorders were important considerations in understanding dropout behaviour and delinquent behaviour. Moreover, in addition to sharing common antecedents, delinquent behaviours figured prominently in theories about why some students leave school early. Several other personal factors have also been associated with early school leaving, including low self-esteem, having friends who are dropouts and delinquents, substance abuse, and emotional instability. Other aspects related to early school leaving included employment during the high school years and a low participation rate in extracurricular and other school-based activities.

School-related variables made up the last unit of analysis. Among dropouts, the combination of disliking and not attending school is a common theme in the literature. Scholars have also agreed that even after controlling for other factors, truancy and discipline problems may be found to be shared risk determinants for dropping out. Additional school-related factors associated with early school leaving included disruptive and aggressive classroom behaviour, a disproportionately high number of suspensions and expulsions, retention in one or more grade levels, and academic deficiencies. As well, dropouts were more likely than non-dropouts to find school boring, acquire low grades, exhibit low IQ scores, and experience learning difficulties in subjects such as mathematics and English. Other research suggested that raising academic standards and streaming may also be linked to early school leaving. Finally, the literature suggested that a negative student-teacher relationship may adversely affect a student's future educational prospects.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In order to provide sufficient information to replicate this present study, Chapter 3 describes its research design and methodological procedures. The chapter begins with a description of the research design, including the particular strategies adopted. This description leads into an explanation of the data gathering and sections addressing data analysis, data trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with delimitations and limitations.

Research Design

According to Bickman, Rog, and Hedrick (1998), the research design "serves as the architectural blueprint of a research project, linking data collection and analysis activities to the research questions and ensuring that the complete research agenda will be addressed" (p. 11). Similarly, Yin (1998) asserted that a research design is "an action plan for getting from here to there" (p. 236). In order to get from "here to there," this study employed a multiple case study approach to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. In particular, 12 case studies was developed and analyzed to illuminate the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Gay (1996) defined "case study" as an "in-depth investigation of one 'unit,' e.g., individual, group, institution, organization, program, document, and so forth" (p. 219). Yin was more precise, suggesting that "In the classic case study, an individual person is the subject of the study and therefore the primary unit of analysis" (p. 237) and arguing that the identification of the unit of analysis is essential in such research. The primary unit of analysis in this study was the school dropout between the ages of 16 to 18 who was involved with the young offender system.

Central to case study research is the notion that "each case study in a report stands alone, allowing the reader to understand the case as a unique, holistic entity" (Patton, 1990, p. 387). Building upon previous case study research, Lincoln and Guba (1990), citing Zeller (1987), noted that a case study may be presented as a narrative. The narrative structure reflects that "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly (1991) presented another useful explanation of "narrative," suggesting that "narrative, or story if one wishes to be modest and unpretentious, names a primary phenomenon in education and a basic phenomenon of life" (p. 259). Erben (1996) provided a third view of narratives, characterizing them as the "types, varieties and patterns of the accounts or stories that compose life-course experience" (p. 160).

The term "narrative" is used broadly in case study research to describe several illustrative structures including the life-history or personal-accounts perspective. Kinkead (1993) noted that personal accounts differ from the sources used in other research methods in that they "focus on whole lives, or people in the round. The person is examined not just as a convenient exemplar of a category we are interested in, but to get at his/her very personal life story, views, and accomplishments" (p. 169). Thus, personal accounts emphasize the detailed aspects of an individual's personal life from beginning to end. Denzin (1989) was more specific, insisting that troublesome events should also be identified and incorporated into the life-history case study.

At the centre of the research design are the research questions providing focus and guidance for the research, Yin (1998) explained that when research questions address the "how" or "why," the preferred research design is the case study strategy. As reported in Chapter 1, but restated here for emphasis, the general research question that guided this study was "Why did these 12 incarcerated youths leave school early?"

To address the general research question, data were sought in connection with the following specific research questions:

1. What demographic and crime-related factors, if any, contributed to these young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?

2. What personal and family background factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?

3. What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?

Data Gathering

Selection of Participants

The study group consisted of 12 male school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 18, all of whom had been convicted under the *Young Offender's Act* (YOA), Canada. The respondents were drawn from a single secure youth detention institution. Various other detention facilities in Canada were also designated as "secure custody" under the provisions of the YOA. However, on the basis of logistical considerations such as feasibility, accessibility, and suitability, only one facility was selected from among the many potential sites.

The informants were identified for this study by using a purposive sampling technique, which assumes that a sample is selected "in a nonrandom manner, based on member characteristics relevant to the research problems" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 459). Henry (1998) and Mertens (1998) have supported the appropriateness of selecting this kind of paradigmatic framework, asserting that purposive or nonprobability approaches to sampling are frequently and effectively used, particularly in qualitative research designs. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also supported the appropriateness of purposive sampling, explaining that in naturalistic inquiry, the researcher "is likely to eschew random or representative sampling in favour of purposive or theoretical sampling because he or she thereby increases the scope of range of data exposed (random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases)" (p. 40).

Two factors guided the purposive selection of the respondent group of early school leavers. First, previous research and the pilot study suggested a high degree of association between criminality and dropping out of school. Second, identification of a suitable dropout population was previously problematic due to the difficulty in locating these persons after they quit school (e.g., Barr-Telford & Castonguay, 1995; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Sullivan, 1987; Wyman, Cowen, Work,

& Kerley, 1993). As Rumberger (1987) remarked, "Surveys of individual school districts show that many school leavers cannot be easily traced" (p. 106). Therefore, this study relied on young offenders as a target group, since they are part of a large dropout population that is consistently accessible because of its circumstances.

Sample Size

According to Patton (1990), "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 184). "Sample size," he elaborated, "depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 184). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further recommended that sample size should be based, in part, on the idea of "informational redundancy" (p. 202), that is, interviewing should be ended only when new information becomes redundant to the point of saturation. The number of participants to be interviewed was also decided by following the practical guidelines of Kvale (1996), who noted that in "current interview studies, the number of interviews tend to be around 15 ± 10" (p. 102). In addition, my research supervisory committee members provided valuable advice regarding sample size. Based on the above suggestions, 12 participants were considered appropriate for this study.

The Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted with 3 male adult inmates who were all incarcerated at the same provincial correctional facility. The participants for the pilot study were identified by using a purposive sampling technique and, in many respects, they demographically mirrored the target population of the actual study. The interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 20 years and were chosen on account of their dropout- and young-offender histories. Over a duration of roughly one week, I approached the participants and invited them to participate in the pilot study. All interviews were audiotaped; however, transcription data were not used in the compilation of the final report. Fully informed and voluntary consent was obtained from the respondent group, and written authorization was granted from institutional management.

This pilot study's purpose was to uncover problems relating to the research process, to allow me to get interview experience in the natural setting, and to estimate the duration of each interview. The pilot study was also conducted to test the appropriateness and clarity of the tentatively formulated interview questions and to determine the participants' general impressions of the instrument. The participants were interviewed separately and were remarkably forthright in answering questions relating to their family and background, personal, and school experiences. The pilot group identified several concerns with respect to the interview guide. Suggestions included, for example, that certain technical terms either be simplified or eliminated to improve understandability. Several of these concerns were incorporated into the final interview schedule.

Interviews

This study did not rely on a network or "snowball" sampling procedure; instead, the school administration provided a list or sampling frame of 25 young offenders who were identified as early school leavers. To promote participation in the study, the school guidance counsellor explained the study's nature and purpose to the participants and assured them that their real names would not be associated with the information gathered. All participants agreed to have their names forwarded to me. The first 12 names on the list determined the respondent group membership and the order in which they would be interviewed. Participants were selected and invited to take part in this study based on their dropout and incarceration status, age, gender, availability and willingness, and ability to speak English. Over a period of three days, I approached 12 participants and briefed them about the study's nature and purpose. All of the participants who were contacted agreed to be interviewed. One individual, however, was unable to participate, and a replacement was duly selected.

After consultation with the school principal, an interviewing timetable was established, and appointments were tentatively set. The location and time of the interviews were chosen mutually by both the school principal and me. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted in the principal's office, five in the guidance office, and two in the dormitory. Ten interviews were carried out during regular school hours, and two were conducted on the weekend. To protect the participants from being identified, however, exact dates of data collection cannot be specified. The participants were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Interviews were conducted in private and behind closed doors to help assure the confidentiality of the information obtained. Except for the dormitory, the interview settings were quiet and physically comfortable. Youths who agreed to partake in the study were required to sign consent forms (Appendixes A and B) and had the opportunity to ask any questions relating to the study. As far as is possible under the law, each participant was guaranteed confidentiality of the information provided and informed that he would receive no financial compensation for participating in the study.

Each participant completed two semi-structured interviews lasting between 90 minutes and 120 minutes, and approximately one week elapsed between interviews. An interview guide was developed that mirrored that of both Tanner et al. (1995) and Young and Reich (1974). A copy of the guide used in this study is provided in Appendix D. Although the sequencing of questions varied from interview to interview, the guide ensured that the data obtained illuminated the phenomenon under study and addressed the three specific research questions.

Institutional and School Documents

Although interviewing was the mainstay of data collection, several other information sources were incorporated into the study. Additional data, in the form of correctional reports and school records, were examined throughout the inquiry and were treated like transcriptions in that they were coded and categorised. Access to these documents did, however, require special arrangements and approval. For example, access to correctional documentation was obtained by way of a judge's order. In granting the order to conduct the study, the provincial judge noted, "I further direct that any record kept pursuant to sections 40, 41, 42, and 43 of the Act [*Young Offenders Act*] with respect to any of the twelve youths be made available to you." School records were also made available to me, but were restricted to those individuals eighteen years of age and older. Correctional reports also provided documentation outlining such measures as classroom deportment, overall school progress, and standard achievement results. As a final note, the accuracy and completeness of this information depended upon the record-keeping system of the institution.

Data Analysis

> Data analysis in qualitative research means breaking down the data and searching for codes and categories which are then reassembled to form themes. (Holloway, 1997, p. 43)

The process of analysis generally followed that outlined by Holloway (1997) and employed techniques consistent with the study's research design. Purposive sampling was the process for data collection, and qualitative coding methods were used "to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (Patton, 1990, p. 372). The following section presents the specific procedures used to analyze the data.

Following the first tape-recorded interview, the unfiltered data were typed verbatim, formatted into a computer database, printed, and read. This process was maintained throughout the analysis. To manage the many pages of interview transcripts, each line of text was sequentially numbered, and question-and-answer sequences were left in paragraph form. Passages quoted in the final report were given a second identification number for increased auditability. The data were organized into thematic sections, all of which corresponded respectively to the study's three specific research questions. Chapter 4 of the report, which was derived from the first section of transcribed evidence, focuses primarily on demographic and crime-related factors. Chapter 5, which was derived from data section two, focuses primarily on family background factors. Chapter 6, which was derived from data section three, focuses primarily on educational factors.

Chapter 7 identifies and discusses themes common to the individual narratives. These chapters are the basis of the summaries, conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter 8.

To address the phenomenon under study, each section of text was examined line-by-line, and preliminary constructs were identified. For this study, "construct" was defined along the lines proposed by Holloway (1997) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) as a general concept built up from specific instances, discrete happenings, events, or observations. For easy identification, these constructs were colour-coded in the context in which they were typewritten. Without altering the original transcripts, the highlighted phrases were electronically segmented from the main text and "pasted" to another data file. Well-defined categories pertaining to events were identified, and subcategories were grouped together and given conceptual labels. After the data were decontextualized and sorted, relationships and themes began to emerge from the transcripts. For instance, themes arose such as school behaviour problems and environmental instability. To facilitate this analytic process, 17 tables were constructed to represent the 97 paths of inquiry. Although none of the tables was visually displayed, the subcategories were incorporated into the text and are presented in Chapters 4 and 7.

As more data became available, comparisons among case studies were carried out, and subcategories were either modified or deleted. Triangulation procedures, which are discussed in a later section of this chapter, also facilitated this labelling process. This strategy was maintained throughout the study and ended only when data saturation occurred. For this study, "saturation" was defined as the point where no new "relevant data can be found and no new ideas for the development of theory arise" (Holloway, 1997, p. 153). Data in the cells of the subcategories were expressed both numerically and "in vivo," that is, in the words used by the participants. In addition, frequencies of events were periodically recorded in tabular form. In aggregate, 97 subcategories encompassed and summarized the study's data and were described in relation to the research literature.

Collective Characteristics of Participants

The participants for this study ranged in age from 16.8 to 18.9 years and were selected from a population of between 100 to 200 secure-custody residents. Of the early school leavers who were contacted for interviews, all were males. The participants in this study had been referred by provincial youth-court judges to a term of secure custody and, in general, represented a risk to either the community or themselves. Most of the youths were recidivists with lengthy criminal records dating from Phase 1 convictions, that is, convictions that they had received when they were between the ages of twelve and fifteen years. All the participants had attended at least two different detention facilities, the mean number of placements being six. On average, the members of the respondent group were serving approximately 392 days of secure custody, 62 days of open custody, followed by 389 days of probation. Ten participants were born in Canada; the remaining 2 participants were born abroad. One-quarter of the respondent group were members of visible minorities. Specifically, 1 participant was Oriental, 2 were Black, and the remainder were Caucasian. The participants for this study were all single, and 1 participant had a child. The first language of all participants was English, and 11 of the 12 youths held Canadian citizenship.

The respondent group had, on average, 3.7 siblings, and the majority of the respondents came from dysfunctional, broken, and low-income families. Just under half of the participants had lived independently before incarceration, and parental relationship problems had been frequent. All 12 participants had experienced school difficulties in the past, and only 5 had "successfully" completed at least their first year of high school before dropping out. Similarly, several participants lagged behind their age group by one or more academic grade levels. Three participants said that before dropping out, they had been consigned to the basic level of instruction, and 9 participants said they were taking courses at the general level. Institutional data noted that on average, approximately 60% of the residents had been identified as "exceptional students"; similarly, a large percentage had experienced various types and degrees of abuse. Finally, data concerning the number of high school credits for the respondent group revealed a wide distribution. Ten participants reported at least two credits, the range being from zero to 21.5. A more detailed description of the youths' backgrounds is presented in Chapters 4 to 6.

Data Trustworthiness

"Trustworthiness" (rigor) is a term referring to the standards or "canons" for judging the quality of research within the naturalistic paradigm. As Holloway (1997) stated, "trustworthiness" in qualitative research "is the truth value of a piece of research. Qualitative research is trustworthy when it reflects the reality and ideas of the participants" (p. 160). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that "the basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). Guba (1981), Guba and Lincoln (1989), and Lincoln and Guba (1985), among other writers (e.g., Eisner, 1991; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Patton, 1990), also addressed strategies to reduce threats to trustworthiness, by considering issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These four criteria were employed in this study and are discussed below.

Credibility

"Credibility" parallels "internal validity" in conventional criteria and is concerned with the truth value of the findings, that is, the accuracy with which the participants in the study can "recognise their contributions and affirm that they are valid" (Scott, 1996, p. 79). Similarly, Mertens (1998) defined "credibility" as "a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints" (p. 181). Further, Bickman et al. (1998) explained that credibility is established when the study design is rigorous enough to support the investigator's conclusions and recommendations. Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several techniques for enhancing the credibility and veracity of a study, including prolonged engagement, member checks, and triangulation, all of which are addressed below.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) described “prolonged engagement” as “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” with the individuals (p. 301). In this study, engagement was prolonged, as much as possible, by having two face-to-face interviews and informal interaction with each respondent. The purpose of the first set of interviews was to get an in-depth picture of the real-life stories of the individuals by allowing them the opportunity to describe their school, personal, and family and background experiences. The second set of interviews, conducted about one week later, was more informal in nature and was intended both to clarify several key issues and to affirm the accuracy and consistency of the findings by cross-checking and comparing the data sets. These data were then combined with the first set of interview transcripts to form one data base.

Before and during the interviews, I spent extended periods in the field, allowing the youths to adjust to my presence. During this three-week adjustment period, I took time to establish friendly relationships with the participants and to remove any hurdles or barriers that might impede the study’s progress. The respondent group of dropouts seemed comfortable with the interviewing process and talked openly and freely about their pasts. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) remarked that “generally, people will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues once they know you” (p. 97). A short questionnaire, containing a number of demographic measures, was also administered about six months after transcription of the interview data. Beyond the methods noted above, phone conversations with several members of the respondent group were conducted to validate information obtained earlier and to fill in gaps in the data. As discussed previously, other research methods were used in the study, including a review of institutional and school documents and other written evidence such as participant résumés. These methods were similarly employed for additional development of the life stories and for clarification of the findings.

“Member checking,” also known as “respondent validation,” was carried out by having the participants verify the transcribed data for accuracy, context, and completeness. A senior probation and parole officer acted as the intermediary for distributing and collecting the full sets of interview transcripts. All 12 data sets were returned to me, and only 4 participants had made any corrections. The interviewees were at liberty to make any changes, to edit or remove any suspect data, or to veto any specific information they deemed inaccurate, inappropriate, unbalanced, or problematic. The solicited feedback from the participants identified several factual errors in the unfiltered interview data, such as dates, names, and geographic locations, but no participant exercised his veto privilege over the documents. These inconsistencies were corrected, and the feedback was incorporated into the raw data. The modified transcripts were included in the compilation of the final report. Without exception, all participants declined the invitation to affirm and corroborate the findings presented in the working drafts of the narratives and research outcomes. This rejection may have been due partly to the relatively large number of typewritten pages initially supplied for examination.

"Triangulation," also known as "structural corroboration," refers to the use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources within the same method, inquirers, and theories or perspectives to survey the same phenomenon or data (Patton, 1990). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) recommended using a variety of data-gathering techniques when they noted, "the more sources tapped for understanding, the more believable the findings" (p. 24). The use of interview data, documentary material such as school records and correctional reports, telephone conversations, participant-observation field notes, and questionnaires provided for multiple perspectives. Generally, the techniques noted above validated the multiple data sources within the same method, revealing similar themes and patterns. However, inconsistencies and contradictions among the findings did arise on occasion. According to Patton (1990), this finding "does not mean that either or both kinds of data are invalid" (p. 467). "More likely," he elaborated, "it means that different kinds of data have captured different things and so the analyst attempts to understand the reason for the differences" (p. 467). From a different viewpoint, Neuman (1997) argued that "even if the student made a false statement, it is evidence about the student's perspective" and may even be a useful piece of data (p. 333).

Transferability

"Transferability" is synonymous with "external validity" in quantitative research and emphasises the "total context in which the research took place to enable readers to make judgements as to the transferability of the study's results to their own situations" (Mertens, 1998, p. 5). In other words, the individuals reading the paper have to make their own decisions as to whether the findings are transferable to other situations. To facilitate the transfer of findings to other social contexts, the researcher usually provides a rich and thick description of the particular phenomenon under study so that the readers feel that they understand its context (Neuman, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1985) submitted that external validity cannot be specified in naturalistic inquiry; the researcher "can provide only a thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316).

Since this study was specific to a single setting and a relatively small number of participants, external validity was not of great concern. However, to enhance transferability, a "thick description" in the form of in-text referencing of data sources, direct quotations, and detailed descriptions of real-life events was incorporated into the compilation of the final report. To further enhance transferability, a purposive sampling strategy was selected because this technique seeks to focus on information-rich and solid descriptive data (Patton, 1990). In this study, a thick description of "time, place, context, and culture" (Mertens, 1998, p. 183) is provided so that the readers can judge the significance of the research and draw their own conclusions about the phenomenon under study. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) noted that when the readers believe and understand the phenomenon, "they use your work in the range of ways that trusted outcomes can be used--to confirm, expand, and inform their own work--and thereby contribute to the accumulative nature of your knowledge" (p. 146).

Dependability

"Dependability" is the counterpart of "reliability" in conventional criteria and is concerned with the consistency or stability of the research processes used. In addressing the issue of dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that credibility (validity) cannot exist without dependability (reliability), so that "a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 316). However, they did propose a technique called the "inquiry audit," which is based metaphorically on the fiscal audit. The audit, also called "the decision trail" (Koch, 1994, p. 976), is conducted to provide a detailed accounting of the paths by which the researcher has collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, "so that readers can follow the decision-making process" (Holloway, 1997, p. 161).

To enhance dependability in this study, an in-depth elaboration of the decisions taken regarding research design, data-collection procedures, and data-analysis techniques are presented throughout the report. As well, the collective and individual profiles of the participants and the rational by which the respondent group was selected is explicated in detail. The logic used for determining the sample size is also explained. Outside of the report, documentation in the form of interview notes and fieldnotes, tables of analysis, earlier edits of the work, a journal of events, regular supervisory meetings, and e-mails documenting several decisions, concerns, and research processes provide for increased auditability.

Confirmability

"Confirmability" is the counterpart of "objectivity" in conventional criteria, and is concerned with neutrality and the "reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher bias" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). Mertens (1998) noted that all data need to be tracked to their original source, and that "the logic that is used to interpret the data should be made explicit" (p. 184). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the confirmability audit is conducted to trace data to their source. In particular, Lincoln and Guba advocated that the audit trail should be supported by "a residue of records stemming from the inquiry" (p. 319). To enhance confirmability, a paper audit was employed in this study to show that the "data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher's imagination" (Mertens, 1998, p. 184).

With respect to research design, the criteria for participant selection and sample size are described in detail. The extensive use of selected references enhances the literature review and supports the research findings. These citations are placed at the end of the document to enhance auditability. With respect to data-collection procedures, details concerning the context and setting were documented on site and later incorporated into the report. Careful but extensive use of verbatim quotations and tacit field notes are woven throughout the narratives to provide a lasting record of the respondents' emic viewpoints. Quotes taken from the raw interview transcripts were colour-coded and supported by a number for easy reference. The reference number corresponds with the page and line number in the final report. In addition, all correspondence and field notes relating to time and place were recorded chronologically and kept on file. With respect to data analysis techniques, the categories, ideas, and themes comprising the study's findings were confirmed with other research studies and were stored in tabular form and maintained for a set period.

Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines formally established by the University of Alberta. Before the study was undertaken, the research proposal and ethics application were submitted to and examined by the Ethics Review Committee in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. The proposed study was considered to have met the standard for the ethical treatment of human research participants, and approval was granted. Several other measures were taken to comply with the University of Alberta standards. First, ethical clearance to conduct the study was sought and granted from a youth court judge, who indicated, by way of letter, his awareness, support, and approval of the study. Second, the appropriate senior correctional officials of each provincial ministry provided letters expressing their approval of the research project.

Third, written authorization was also obtained from two school districts involved in the study. Fourth, approval was sought from and granted by institutional management and the appropriate school administrators. The following discussion addresses several ethical issues listed in the document entitled *Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants.* In particular, the issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are considered.

Informed Consent

Fully informed and voluntary consent was obtained from each participant in this study. By way of a verbal consent script (Appendix C), the participants were debriefed about the purpose and procedures of the research in general and the interviews in particular, and given the opportunity to ask any pertinent questions. Additional information was communicated, including a description of the participants' time commitment; a statement outlining compensation, their rights in participating in the study, and a description of how confidentiality would be maintained; and an explanation of whom to contact for answers should any questions arise about the research.

Two letters of consent (Appendixes A and B) were used to inform the prospective participants of the expectations for their involvement, their freedom without jeopardy to decline to participate, and their assurance of confidentiality. Combined, the letters of consent also provided the name and address of the principal investigator, a statement of why the participants were selected for the study, the month during which the interviews would be conducted, and a statement indicating that the participant had read the consent form and understood the meaning of the information presented. The informants were allowed an ample amount of time (roughly 10 minutes) to read and assess the consent forms before signing them. The participants' signatures on the letters of consent reflect their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. A photocopy of the letters of consent and a summary description of the study were given to each interviewee for future reference.

Confidentiality

Participants in the study were assured of complete confidentiality as far as possible under the law. The names of the participants and the sponsoring institutions were changed for ethical and legal reasons, and several other safeguards were incorporated to ensure confidentiality. To protect confidentiality, no specific geographical locations or dates are provided in the study. This practice was followed, in part, to prevent information from being traced back to the informants. Also, individual identifiers and participant characteristics that violated confidentiality were either eliminated, altered, or presented in aggregate form.

Great care was exercised in obtaining, transcribing, and storing the raw interview data. Transcription of the interview tapes was done immediately following each interview, and in order to further secure confidentially, I personally transcribed all tape-recordings, and did not discuss identifiable data with anyone. No third parties examined the raw data because of my agreement with the Ministry of Corrections/Justice. Further, access to any unfiltered data was limited to me, the interviewer. Rather than using their real names, each participant was identified by an identification number, and pseudonyms were employed in the compilation of the final report. The use of identification numbers ensured that the participants' identities remained separate from the verbatim transcripts. To preserve confidentiality further, only I, the researcher, knew the identities of the respondent group.

Following the last communication with the informants, the master code that revealed their identities was destroyed. Thus, by the end of the study, the identities of the participants became unknown to me. The transcription data and interview tapes were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet, and computer files were accessible only by password. After completion of the study, all raw data including cassette tapes were destroyed, and the letters of consent, which included the dates of signatures of both the participants and me were sealed in an envelope and stored in a safety deposit box. This documentation will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations

"Delimitations" are "limitations on the research design that you have imposed deliberately. These delimitations usually restrict the population to which the results of the study can be generalized" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 90). This study had the following delimitations:

1. The study was delimited to young offenders from one secure custody institution located in Canada.

2. The study addressed family background, school, and criminal characteristics associated with early school leaving mainly from the emic perspective of 12 male young offenders.

3. Interviews and document analysis were the primary basis of data collection. The data-gathering process was delimited to two personal interviews that occurred over a three week-period.

4. The data for this study were collected from a purposefully selected sample of 12 participants.

Limitations

"Limitations" are the restrictions in the study over which the researcher has little or no control (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). This study had the following limitations:

1. The accuracy of the findings is limited by the subjective opinions and personal impressions obtained through the interviews with young offenders.

2. The respondents' ability to remember experiences, attitudes, and feelings may be a limiting factor. Respondents may be predisposed to provide inaccurate or incorrect information. Respondents may be uneasy about divulging sensitive or personal information. They might not want to say something that they think "society" might disapprove of or that will make them "look bad."

3. Due to the selective or purposive sampling techniques, the results from the study cannot be generalized beyond the participants under study. In the present study,

the data were collected on a voluntary basis; consequently, nothing guaranteed that the young offenders selected were typical of the general population in the correctional facility.

4. The accuracy of the findings is, in part, limited by the record-keeping system of the institutions involved in the study.

CHAPTER 4

THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

> Too often the concept of juvenile justice becomes confused with the system of courts, probation officers, social workers, detention centres, police officers, and those who devote special attention to the legal problems of the youth or our society. Juvenile justice, however, is better defined as *fair and reasonable treatment for all children.* The point to be made is not that these persons and institutions have failed, but every teacher must remember teachers are very much a part of the juvenile justice system. Indeed, teachers play a central role because they stand *in loco parentis.* (Giles & Proudfoot, 1994, p. 124)

This chapter provides a context for the study that follows and is organized into 5 sections. The first section provides an historical overview of the juvenile justice system in Canada in order to provide a basis for understanding the *Young Offender Acts* (YOA). The second section describes the philosophy and basic components of the YOA. Understanding the participants' world also requires an understanding of the justice system which governs their environment, a system that Giles and Proudfoot (1994) believe has relevance for teachers. The third and fourth sections present collective and individual profiles of the participants in order to provide a backdrop for the findings in the chapters that follow. The names of individual participants and the sponsoring institution have been changed for legal and ethical reasons, and any identifying information has been eliminated. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented in each section.

The Juvenile Justice System: An Historical Overview

Before the nineteenth century, Canada had no legal structure in place to deal with juvenile delinquency, and children had few legal rights. Wayward adolescents were held accountable for their actions and subjected to the same, sometimes harsh punishments administered to adults. This approach to juvenile delinquency was based on the Crime Control Model, which emphasized societal protection and incarceration. This punitive resolution to delinquency was eventually replaced by a system perceived to be more suitable. The nineteenth century was a period of changing perceptions about youth and delinquency. Juvenile courts were established, alternatives to incarceration were imposed, the roots of the modern youth probation system were laid down, reformatories were built, and laws were enacted to distinguish young offenders from adult offenders (Bala, 1997).

The *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (JDA), premised on positivist criminology, came into force in 1908 and offered a new perspective on youth crime and punishment. The positivist view contended that adolescents were not criminals, but engaged in delinquent behaviour because they came from the "wrong side of the tracks." This view maintained that external forces affecting socialization, such as lack of parental care, discipline, education, and money, were to blame for deviancy, and that rehabilitation could be attained only through suitable governmental interventions (Bala, 1997). Thus, the JDA followed a philosophy promoting the use of informal legal procedures and indeterminate custodial dispositions to rehabilitate insufficiently socialized delinquents (Corrado, 1992).

The JDA's underlying and guiding philosophy was based upon the principle of *parens patriae*, a Latin term meaning "parent of the country," which implied a perception of the state as a kindly surrogate parent who dealt with the juvenile delinquent in a non-adversarial manner (Hartnagel & Baron, 1995; Milner, 1995; MSGCS, 1997). Under this Welfare Model approach, the state no longer dealt with delinquents as criminals, but as misdirected children requiring help, guidance, and proper supervision (MSGCS, 1997). The JDA received two main criticisms. First, the legal rights of young persons were often overlooked, particularly in minority, immigrant, urban poor, and other marginalized groups. Second, judges, police and probation officers, and other members of the juvenile justice system possessed significant discretionary powers that were reflected in every stage of the judicial process, but most obviously in the custodial setting (Bala, 1997). For example, authorities were allowed to incarcerate young persons for as long as authorities deemed necessary, irrespective of the type of crimes committed. Delinquents were released from custody only when they had reached adult status or demonstrated their "rehabilitation" to correctional officials.

By the 1960s, the act was being examined and challenged on many fronts. The JDA had several opponents and critics (e.g., Lovekin, 1961; McGrath, 1961, cited in Hartnagel & Baron, 1995) due to its arbitrary, lenient, and informal nature (Hartnagel & Baron, 1995). Public concern and controversy resulted in the federal government releasing a report entitled *Juvenile Delinquency in Canada.* This 1965 report initiated extensive discourse and progressive reform because of its faultfinding nature, but the YOA was not tabled in Parliament until 1981. Besides the federal government's report, another catalyst for change was the introduction of human rights for children. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was proclaimed in 1982 and clearly contradicted the JDA. Lack of due process and rights for youths was inconsistent with Section 15(1) of the Charter, which states:

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical ability.

In 1984, the JDA was replaced by the federal *Young Offenders Act*, which reflected the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and assumed that young persons were accountable for their behaviour. The YOA was the federal government's conclusive resolution to 20 years of scholarly research, discussion and working papers, recommendations, concessions, and arduous negotiations. As well, this act was also a microcosm of the changing culture's values and attitudes towards young persons in trouble with the law, especially those convicted of violent offences (MSGCS, 1997). The new act, passed unanimously in the House of Commons, offered a different philosophy than that of the JDA (Hudson, Hornick, & Burrows, 1988). The YOA's guiding philosophy was based on a Justice Model of crime. This neoclassical approach to youth justice was grounded on (a) the supposition that punishment should be consistent with the crime, and (b) the principle of the right of due process for adolescents (Corrado, 1992; MSGCS, 1997). Accordingly, the YOA was founded on the axioms of responsibility, accountability, and the protection of society (Bala & Lilles, 1982; Stauffer, 1981; Wilson, 1982). While still preserving the principle of *parens patriae,* the courts were now required to emphasize the legal rights of youths, from their initial contact with police to their final stages of appeal (Corrado, 1992; Schissel, 1993).

The Young Offenders Act: Philosophy and Basic Components

The YOA diverged considerably from the *parens patriae* orientation of the JDA by recognizing the constitutional and legal rights of young persons. The new YOA was intended to bring the youth justice system more in line with the criminal or adult justice system (Schissel, 1993). It was, according to Bala (1997), "clearly criminal law, not child-welfare legislation" (p. 34). The YOA's philosophy is outlined in Section 3(1), which explicates the following fundamental principles: (a) young people will be held accountable for their criminal behaviour and will be charged for the same crimes as adults; however, they will not always be held accountable in the same way as adults; (b) to protect society, young persons may be supervised, disciplined, and controlled if they are found guilty of a criminal offence; (c) young persons have special needs because they may not be mature enough to fully understand the consequences of their actions; and as a result, they require guidance and assistance; (d) judicial proceedings should be avoided, and alternate measures imposed for those young persons who have committed crimes of a nonviolent nature; (e) young people are afforded the same rights and freedoms as adults and are entitled to the maintenance of their freedom consistent with the protection of society; and (f) young persons should be removed from their homes only when parental supervision is inappropriate or nonexistent.

By the late 1980s, few legalists, politicians, or citizens had much faith in the act, and many were criticizing it for three main reasons. First, the maximum sentence for an indictable offence was only three years, which many considered inadequate for serious and violent crimes. Second, difficulties occurred in transferring youths to the adult court system where they would face stiffer sentences, or "dispositions," as they are euphemistically called in the YOA. Third, access to information on young offenders was extremely restricted and confidential (Bala, 1997; Bala & Kirvan, 1991; Creechan & Silverman, 1995; Sampaio, 1996). The right to the total protection of privacy for young persons was enshrined in the act, a stricture extended to all public and private organizations. In addition, Section 38 of the YOA prohibited the news media from publicly broadcasting or naming any victim, witness, or family member, as the young person could be identified by implication if the media did so. In 1992 and 1995, the governments of the day responded to the public concern and outcry by lengthening the maximum sentences to 5 and 10 years, respectively (Bala, 1997). In addition, the 1995 amendments to Section 38 (1.13) provided for greater information sharing among professionals such as school officials and teachers (Alberta Education & Alberta Justice, 1996; Bala, 1997; Canadian School Boards Association, 1996).

The last attempt at overhauling the YOA was introduced in 1998, following more of the same criticisms noted above. On May 12, 1998 the federal government announced plans to replace the 14-year-old controversial YOA with the so-called *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Tentative legislation was drafted to address five primary contextual factors: tougher treatment for extremely violent and repeat young offenders; alternatives to the court system for less serious and first-time offenders; increased public identification of those young offenders who have established a pattern of violent offences or of those facing adult sentences; less public financial support for those parents capable of paying their own legal costs; and a greater emphasis on crime prevention and early childhood intervention (Bindman & Bronskill, 1998; Mcilroy & Feschuk, 1998; Mulawka, 1998).

Like the *Criminal Code of Canada*, the YOA is a federal statute dealing with criminal legislation, unlike the Code, the YOA applies to young persons aged 12-17. Young persons under age 12 are not held criminally responsible for their actions; consequently, they are not prosecuted under the act but by child welfare legislation. A branch of the provincial government has this responsibility. The law of the land in Canada establishes a system of youth courts, procedures, and dispositions independent and distinct from the adult court system; nevertheless, the youth court system provides for the same guarantees, rights, and freedoms as those granted to adults and holds youths responsible for their actions. Further, because of their age and maturity level, young persons have broader rights not necessarily guaranteed to adults under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. For example, young persons may have a lawyer present during bail, transfer, sentence, and disposition procedures (Cunningham & Griffiths, 1997).

The disposition phase of criminal proceedings is carried out uniformly by youth court judges across the country; however, substantial provincial variation exists in the administration of the YOA. For example, in some provinces, young persons aged 12 to 15 appear in the family division of the provincial court while those aged 16 to 17 appear in its criminal division. Sanctions rendered by youth-court judges vary considerably depending on the nature and extent of the crime or crimes committed. The provisions set out in the YOA allow for a full assessment of youths by the court. For the more serious offender, the judge may request a detailed psychiatric, medical, or psychological assessment and/or a pre-disposition report (PDR), pursuant to Sections 13 and 14 of the YOA. The assessments noted above are designed to aid the courts in sentencing. Section 24(2) of the YOA stipulates that "before making an order of committal to custody, the youth court judge shall consider a pre-disposition report." According to Bala (1992), these assessments are not binding on the courts, but are frequently influential.

The YOA has 15 sections governing dispositions. Sanctions available to judges are outlined under Sections 20 through 35 and for ease of comprehension are categorized from less intrusive to more intrusive: (a) an absolute discharge, pursuant to Section 20(1)(a); (b) a fine up to $1,000 depending on ability to pay, pursuant to Section 20(1)(a.1); (c) compensation to victim, pursuant to Section 20(1)(c); (d) restitution, pursuant to Section 20(1)(d); (e) compensation of innocent purchases, pursuant to

Section 20(1)(e); (f) personal service order pursuant to Section 20(1)(f); (g) community service order up to 240 hours, pursuant to Section 20(1)(g); (h) an order of prohibition, seizure or forfeiture, pursuant to Section 20(1)(h); (i) a treatment order, pursuant to Section 20(1)(i); (j) a period of probation, up to 2 years, pursuant to Section 20(1)(j); (k) a term of open custody, pursuant to Sections 20(1)(k) and 24.1(1); (l) a term of secure custody, pursuant to Sections 20(1)(k), 20(1)(k.1), 24.1(1) or 24.5(1); and (m) combination of dispositions, pursuant to Sections 20 to 35.

These dispositions are based on the principles of responsibility, accountability, the protection of society, and rehabilitation. Although the YOA emphasizes alternative measures for less serious offenders (Section 3[1]), those found guilty of violent crimes or otherwise perceived to be a risk to society are incarcerated in secure-custody facilities, pursuant to Sections 20(1)(k), 20(1)(k.1), 24.1(1) or 24.5(1) of the YOA. Unlike the multi-level classification system for adults, the young offender secure custody system generally has only one designation: maximum security. The harshest and most intrusive disposition imposed by a youth-court judge is to order the young person into one of these institutions. The 12 participants of the present study fell into that group. All 12 participants had been referred by provincial youth-court judges to a term of secure custody and, in general, the youths represented a risk to either the community or themselves. Moreover, several of these youth had been identified as being chronically violent young offenders. Secure custody is intended as a "last-ditch" effort for transformation and rehabilitation; usually all other legal avenues and options have been exhausted.

Collective Characteristics of Participants

This section of Chapter 4 presents background information related to the participants and is guided by specific research question 1: What demographic and criminal factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' dropping out of high school? Various methods were employed to gather the data and are explained in this study in both aggregate and individual forms. Further, many background characteristics of the participants are detailed below, and when practical, these are compared with national statistics. To ensure confidentiality, the participants are profiled in general terms, and fictitious names are assigned, partly to fulfil the dictates of the YOA.

The study group consisted of 12 male adolescents from a single secure-custody detention facility, all of whom had been convicted under the YOA. According to Statistics Canada (2000) data, 25,186 youths were placed in custody in 1998-1999, and about half of these young offenders were sentenced to a secure-custody detention facility. At the time of interviewing, the institution's young offender population ranged from between 100 to 200 secure-custody residents. The sample size, therefore, represented between one-tenth and one-twentieth of the secure-custody population. The institution was governed and operated by the provincial government and was one of several young offender detention facilities located in the province. The correctional facility provided residential and educational programs for young offenders serving dispositions and for those who had been sentenced and were awaiting additional criminal charges under the YOA. Residential programs at the correctional institution included alcoholics anonymous, victim awareness, drug and alcohol counselling, group counselling, individual drug-and alcohol-awareness counselling, social counselling, psychiatric assessment and counselling, independent life skills, seven steps society, anger management, and school. The educational program administered by the local board of education included a full complement of administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and support staff.

Other important background factors in relation to the respondent group of young offenders are compositional variables such as race and ethnicity. In the present study, "ethnic origin" refers to the "ethnic or cultural group(s) to which the respondent's ancestors belong" while "visible minority" refers to "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada, 2001a). According to Canadian census data for 1996, approximately 1 in 3 residents were of multiple ethnic origin, and 1 in 9 was a member of a visible minority. The 12 participants in the present study generally reflected that racially and ethnically diverse ratio: 9 were Caucasian, 2 were Black, and 1 was Oriental. Ethnic origin was coded from self-reports and institutional documents.

Studies have shown that students who are considered as racial-ethnic minorities may be more apt than other students to leave school early (e.g., Chavez et al., 1989; Coley, 1995; Doss & Holley, 1985; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Frank, 1990; Hammack, 1986; Pallas, 1987; Rumberger, 1983, 1987). However, other research literature noted that few differences existed between ethnic groups once structural characteristics such as those of SES are accounted for (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Fernandez, Paulsen, & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Frank, 1990; Kaufman & Bradby, 1992; Kaufman et al., 1992; McMillen et al., 1993; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger et al., 1990). In any case, 10 participants were born in Canada; the remaining 2 participants were born outside Canada. According to Canadian census data for 1996, 1 in 6 residents were immigrants. In the present study, "immigrant" refers to the "people who are, or have been, landed immigrants in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2001b). The literature revealed little consensus regarding the impact of immigrant status on early school leaving. Some scholars reported higher dropout rates (e.g., Denton & Hunter, 1991) while others reported lower rates (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993).

Before incarceration, all 12 participants had lived in Canadian urban centres. The research literature concerning geographical location and early school leaving is mixed: some evidence suggested, but did not conclusively demonstrate, that early school leaving may be linked to urban populations (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; DeYoung, 1994; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Rumberger & Larson, 1998), while opposing arguments noted that rural populations may place less emphasis on high school completion (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Sullivan, 1988). However, Butlin (1999), relying on the SLF (1995) data, found that high school graduates from urban areas were far more likely compared to rural graduates to attend a post-secondary institution. (The 1996 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) study, which analyzed data from 23,000 children from infancy to 11 years of age, reported that just over 82% of these children had lived in urban centres (Ross, Scott, & Kelly, 1996b).) Overall, the data of the 12 participants approach these statistics. Moreover, all 12 participants were single, and only 1 participant had a child. Finally, the first language of all participants was English, and 11 of the 12 youths held Canadian citizenship. The findings from this study approach national census figures for 1996. For example, in Canada, approximately 8 in 10 residents had English or French as their mother tongue. In the present study, "mother tongue" refers to the "first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census" (Statistics Canada, 2001c).

The following describes the family background characteristics and structural information of each participant. These data were derived exclusively from interview conversations. When interviewed, the participants ranged in chronological age from 16.8 to 18.9 years old; therefore, the study focused on the developmental stage of late adolescence to early adulthood. The mean, median, and modal ages of participants in the present study were 17.86, 17.70, and 17.30 years of age, respectively. The correctional facility's mean young offender age of 17.33 years generally mirrored that of the respondent group. Although just less than half of the participants were 18, they were still considered young offenders because their offences had been committed as youths. According to Bala (1997), the date for establishing YOA jurisdiction is the date the criminal act was committed. For example, if a person is approaching 18 at the time of arrest and subsequently attends court after his or her birthday, the full disposition could be dealt with under the YOA. However, once a young offender attains the age of 18, the courts have legal authority to direct that person to serve the remaining portion of his or her sentence in a correctional facility for adults (see Section 24.5 (1), YOA, 1985). Amendments to the YOA over the last 8 years have cleared the way for transferring youths, especially violent youths, to the adult system where they face longer dispositions and potential public identification. When interviewed, no participants in the present study had been scheduled for transfer proceedings.

Not surprisingly, all 12 participants had experienced school problems (e.g., truancy, low achievement, suspensions, expulsions, and early withdrawal). Slightly more than half of the participants had not completed Grade 9 before incarceration. Only 5 of the 12 participants had "successfully" completed at least their first year of high school before dropping out. The dropout rates for this study are much higher than those reported in national census data. For example, in 1991, 3.8% of Canadian individuals aged 15 to 24 had less than Grade 9 (Guppy & Davies, 1998). Further, in 1996, 79% of young people between the ages of 15 to 19 declared themselves as full-time students. However, the findings from the national SLS (1991) study confirmed the trend reported in this study. The results of the SLS study noted that almost one out of three school leavers had obtained only Grade 9 or less before prematurely leaving (Gilbert et al., 1993). Similarly, Gastright and Ahmad (1988), using data from a large American urban district, reported that 55% of the school districts' early school leavers had left high school before they had completed Grade 10.

The data concerning the number of children in the participants' families revealed a wide distribution. Eleven participants reported at least one sibling, the range of the total cohort being from 0 to 13 siblings. The respondent group had, on average, 3.7 siblings; however, several families were characterized by both half-siblings and step-siblings. For single-parent families in Canada, the 1998 average of 1.5 siblings does not approximate this study's findings (Statistics Canada, 2001d). A variety of research evidence has suggested that children from large families are more likely than other children to develop antisocial behaviour and thus get into trouble with the law (e.g., Hinshaw & Zupan, 1997; Hirschi, 1991; Morash & Rucker, 1989; Rosen, 1985; Sampson & Laub, 1993) and score lower on IQ tests (e.g., Blake, 1989).

The proportion of family breakups among the participants' natural parents was considerably higher than it is among the general population. An astonishing 11 of the 12 early school leavers in the present study came from "broken" homes, although several participants had lived in blended families before being arrested. Using a qualitative approach, Okey and Cusick's (1995) study of 12 school dropouts confirmed the trend reported in this study. Their results noted that only 6 of the 12 dropouts came from intact nuclear families (i.e., a social group consisting of both natural or biological parents). Considering that 84.2% of Canadian children live in two-parent families (Ross et al., 1996b), these rates are exceptional. The family structure of the participants' natural parents included four nominal level categories: married, never married, separated, and divorced. Six participants came from households characterized by divorce, 3 participants said that their natural parents were never married, 2 participants said that their parents were separated, while only 1 participant came from an intact nuclear family.

Besides the status of lone parent, the general familial pattern was that of common-law marriage, remarriage, and multiple marriages. Six participants came from homes marked by one-parent families, 3 participants came from homes marked by common-law arrangements, 2 participants came from homes marked by either remarriage or reconstituted families, while 1 participant lived in a traditional nuclear family. The figures noted above are much higher than those based on Canadian census data. For instance, in Canada it was reported that in 1996, 1 in 7 families in private households were single-parent families (Statistics Canada, 2001e).

In general, children from single-parent families or children living independently are more likely to leave school early compared to children living in dual-parent families. For example, Sunter (1993), relying on data from the SLS (1991) study, noted that youths living independently were more than twice as likely to have dropped out of school as compared with their non-dropout counterparts. In a longitudinal study, Wright (1985) concluded that students living in dual-parent families were more likely to graduate from high school than their one-parent counterparts, father-only living arrangements being worse than mother-only. Finally, those students living without a parent or in a group home were least likely to graduate from school. Within the Canadian context, Radwanski (1987) further emphasized the importance of family structure in the dropout equation, pointing out that "young people from single-parent households are considerably more likely to drop out than those from homes in which both parents are present" (p. 74).

Many other studies also provided valuable discussions regarding the association between family structure and early school leaving (e.g., Amato, 1987; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Corcoran, Gordon, Laren, & Solon, 1987; Edmonton Public School Board, 1996; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Frase, 1989; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Gilbert et al., 1993; Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Karp, 1988; Krein & Beller, 1988; McLanahan, Astone, & Marks, 1994; McNeal, 1995; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1985; Rumberger, 1987; Sandefur et al., 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

The participants in the present study were also asked about their most recent living arrangements. Just under half of the participants had lived without a parent before incarceration. For discussion purposes, the informants' responses were grouped into four nominal level categories: living with the natural mother, living with the natural father, living with both natural parents, or living independently. Approximately two-thirds of the participants interviewed in the present study were either living in single-parent households or living independently before incarceration. Four of the 5 oldest participants had been residing with a parent. Further, 5 participants had lived independently, and only 1 participant had lived in a traditional intact nuclear family. Participants in the present study differed noticeably during the early years of their lives from the general profile of 0-to-11-year-olds in Canada. Data from the SLS (1991) study revealed that, respectively, only 15% and 7% of the population had lived in single-parent and no-parent families (Gilbert et al., 1993).

Most of the participants in the present study had been raised in single-parent families because of either separation, divorce, abandonment, or death of a parent. Recent studies suggested that short-term social consequences of single-parent families, especially female-headed households, included high rates of poverty and government subsidies such as welfare (e.g., Dornbusch et al., 1985; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Mitchell, 1991; Natriello et al., 1985; Peng & Lee, 1993; Ross et al., 1996a; Shiono & Quinn, 1994; Vickers, 1994). Moreover, the long-term consequences of divorce and separation included higher rates of psychological, emotional, and behavioural problems (e.g., Astone &

McLanahan, 1991; Driedger, 1998; King, 1986; Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985; NLSCY, 1996; Ross et al., 1998a; Shiono & Quinn, 1994), including higher rates of early school leaving (e.g., Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Karp, 1988; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; McMullan, Leiderman, & Wolf, 1988; Natriello et al., 1985; Oakland, 1992; Rumberger, 1987; Williams, 1985; Wright, 1985). Further, adolescents who have experienced family disruption through either separation or divorce are more likely than other youths to use drugs (e.g., Baumrind, 1985; Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon, 1985; Garnier et al., 1997; Turner, Irwin, & Millstein, 1991), have health problems (e.g., Ross et al., 1998a), and become involved with the youth justice system (e.g., King, 1986; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; Sampson, 1987; Saner & Ellickson, 1996). The findings from the present study support those of the above literature. In identifying the reasons for leaving school early, family structure is an obvious consideration. The accumulated research literature clearly supported the notion that youths from structurally disadvantaged families (i.e., single-parent families) may be at greater risk for delinquency, school failure, and other social pathologies.

The following provides specific information concerning educational attainment, employment status, and household income of the participants' parents. This analysis was prompted by Ross et al. (1996b), who suggested that the important characteristics in determining the well-being of Canadian children included "household income and parents' labour-market status and education" (p. 32). The analysis concentrated on five general categories, including (a) natural mother's educational attainment, (b) natural father's educational attainment, (c) natural mother's employment status, (d) natural father's employment status, and (e) household income. For discussion purposes, all five categories were aggregated into one measure termed "family social status."

In general, both parental education and household income were reported to be relatively low for the participants' families. The mean, median, and modal levels of education for the participants' parents were 10.5, 10.5, and 10.0 years, respectively (in the order mentioned, college and university counted for an additional two and four years of education). The parents' educational attainment was divided into three broad categories: school dropouts, high-school graduates, and post-secondary credentials. When the participants were interviewed, most of their natural parents had not completed high school. Dissaggregating the data reveals that 3 out of 24 parents had educational levels ranging between Grade 2 and Grade 8. Further, 13 of the 24 parents had educational levels ranging between Grade 9 and 11; the remaining 8 parents had educational levels ranging between Grade 12 and university. This study's findings parallel research results of other studies. For example, Okey and Cusick (1995), who qualitatively studied the family context of 12 school dropouts, reported that 15 of the 24 natural parents had not graduated from high school.

Some evidence in the literature suggested that the children of parents with a low level of education are more apt than other children to leave school early. For example, Radwanski (1987) emphasized this point: "The lower the level, occupational status and level of education of his/her parents, the greater is the statistical risk that any given student will not complete school" (p. 71). More recently, Goldschmidt and Wang's (1999) study relying on the database of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study found evidence that parents' lack of education was highly correlated with the propensity to drop out of school. Numerous other cross-sectional and longitudinal research-based studies have also shown a consistent relationship between low parental educational attainment and adolescent school leaving (e.g., Davies, 1994; Denton & Hunter, 1991; Edmonton Public School Board, 1996; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Frank, 1990; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Hodgkinson, 1985; Janosz et al., 1997; Karp, 1988; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Rumberger, 1987; Sunter, 1993; Tanner et al, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Conversely, empirical evidence pointed to a nexus between highly educated parents and positive academic outcomes of offspring. For instance, de Brouker and Lavallée (1998), drawing on data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) for Canada conducted among 5,660 individuals in 1994, found that "Young adults aged 26 to 35 were close to three times more likely to earn postsecondary credentials if their parents had a postsecondary education than if their parents had not completed high school" (p. 24). Other research also suggested a connection between parental educational attainment, particularly maternal educational attainment, and academic outcomes of children (e.g., Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Spencer, Cole, DuPree, Glymph, & Pierre, 1993). Indeed, the literature also reported a relationship between parents' educational involvement with their offspring and dropping out (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Rumberger et al., 1990), particularly when this involvement did not include parents checking homework (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). Further, research showed that children from homes where parental educational attainment was low or a low priority were more likely than other youths to become involved with the youth justice system (e.g., Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Jenkins, 1995; Saner & Ellickson, 1996).

Overall, research evidence supported the contention that children from families of low social status were more likely than other youths to have academic achievement problems (e.g., Caldas, 1993; Krahn & Lowe, 1993; NLSCY, 1996; Ross et al., 1996a; Rumberger & Willms, 1992; Ryan & Adams, 1999) and leave school early (e.g., Brooks-Gun & Furstenberg, 1986; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Coleman, 1990; Economic Council of Canada, 1992; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Finn, 1987; Frank, 1990; Gilbert et al., 1993; Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Hahn, 1987; Kolstad & Owings, 1986; Krahn & Lowe, 1993; McNeal, 1995; Rumberger, 1987; Sunter, 1993; Tidwell, 1988; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

The following analysis provides specific information concerning parents' employment status. Participants were asked in an open-ended manner to indicate their parents' current employment status. These data were then coded as either blue-collar, white-collar, or welfare. The findings reveal that 4 out of 24 parents were employed in white-collar occupations, 12 in blue-collar occupations, and 8 were sustained by government assistance such as welfare. (Approximately 10% of Canadian children live in homes where welfare is the primary source of income (Ross et al., 1996b).) As well, the literature has shown a consistent relationship between adolescent school leaving and parental occupational status (e.g., Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Okey & Cusick, 1995). Unfortunately, the cross-sectional research design of the present study is rather problematic in determining generational patterns. Future longitudinal studies designed to systematically explore this area would be useful.

As a crude indicator, the participants were also asked to rate their families' income level. Since this marker or guide may have missed other relevant financial information, caution must be exercised when interpreting the data. In a similar vein, Duncan et al. (1994) commented that "parental incomes are neither reported reliably by adolescents nor recalled reliably by retrospective studies" (p. 287). Nonetheless, this proxy measure is generally accepted by researchers in both qualitative and quantitative studies (Huston et al., 1994). The families' household incomes were coded into three ordinal scaled categories: low, medium, and high household incomes. Just under one-half of the respondents described their parents' income as being in the medium range. The remaining 7 participants considered their family's income to be low, while no participants reported a high household income. This study's findings agree with several recent reports stating that low household income is a predictor of early school leaving. For example, Okey and Cusick (1995), who studied the family context of 12 early school leavers, reported that 10 participants had come from homes characterised by low incomes. (The findings of the NLSCY (1996) reported that a total of 24.6% of Canadian children aged 0 to 11 years came from homes classified as "poor" (Ross et al., 1996b).) It may be cautiously concluded that only a small portion of the families in the present study had obtained financial independence. These findings are not surprising given that the overwhelming majority of the parents were neither supplemented by a second income nor had a high-school education.

While not unequivocal, the weight of the research evidence suggested support for the literature's assertions that children from lower-income and poor families were more likely to have had educational difficulties (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Lipps & Frank, 1997; Ross et al., 1996b) and to have dropped out of school (e.g., Bryk & Thum, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gilbert et al., 1993; Natriello et al., 1990; Ross et al., 1996a; Rumberger, 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Vickers, 1994). On the other hand, empirical evidence pointed to a nexus between high SES families and post-secondary participation of offspring (e.g., Fournier, Butlin, & Giles, 1995; Looker, 1997; McGrath, 1996). Several other research-based studies have shown a positive correlation between low SES and delinquency (e.g., Apple, 1989; Farrington et al., 1990; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; McGahey, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1994). To some extent, the findings noted above parallel those of the present study. Clearly, research evidence underscored the nexus between low family social status and parental educational attainment. In conclusion, this section provided an introduction to the topic of family social status, which will be investigated further in subsequent chapters.

What follows describes the recidivism and the offending patterns of the respondent group. To investigate these issues, five indicators were examined: (a) offenders who were 12 to 15 years old (Phase One), (b) number of previous convictions, (c) previous convictions for violence, (d) current convictions for violence, and (e) previous terms of detention. These data were derived from interviews with the participants and institutional documents. Most of the participants in the present study were recidivists with lengthy criminal records. In general, evidence in the literature suggested that youths with extensive criminal records were more likely than other offenders to reoffend in the future (e.g., Maguire, Flanagan, & Thornberry, 1988; Visher, Lattimore, & Linster, 1991). According to Statistics Canada (2000) data, "forty-two percent of young offenders sentenced in 1998/99 were considered recidivists." Although few federal recidivism studies have been conducted to date, provincial ministries have been the harbingers of such research, reporting rates from 44% to 82% (e.g., Leschied, Andrews, Hoge, 1992; Sampaio, 1996).

Eleven participants in the present study had criminal records dating from Phase

One convictions. Moreover, an extensive and longstanding body of literature has consistently documented that early delinquent behaviour is a good predictor of later adult criminal behaviour (Farrington et al., 1986; Kandel et al., 1988; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; Robins & Ratcliff, 1979; White, Moffitt, Silva, 1989). Further, 8 of the 12 participants had a record of multiple convictions, the average for the cohort being approximately 6. Additionally, 5 of this study's participants had been classified as "chronic offenders." Research centring on "chronic" offending has routinely operationalized this term to mean six or more arrests (e.g., Loeber & Farrington, 1998).

Loeber and Farrington (1997), relying on several studies (i.e., Farrington & West, 1993; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1995; Wolfgang, Figlio, & Sellin, 1972), noted that "a minority of 'chronic' offenders account for a large proportion of all offenses" (p. 129). Likewise, Bala (1997), noted that "a relatively small portion of all adolescents are within the latter group of more serious, repeat offenders, but they are," he elaborated, "responsible for a disproportionately large amount of violent offences" (p. 18). Eleven of the 12 participants in this study had been convicted of at least one violent crime (i.e., armed robbery, assault, attempted murder, burglary with injury), and 8 participants had a prior history of detention. It should be noted that the expression "previous term of detention" includes both open and secure custody. Predictably, a solid body of research evidence has shown that dropping out of school is linked to increased rates of juvenile delinquency (e.g., Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984; Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Stedman et al., 1988).

Data from the participants' correctional institution showed an average secure custody disposition of approximately 75 days. On average, the participants in this study were serving approximately 392 days of secure custody followed by 62 days of open custody, the national averages being 107 and 84 days, respectively (Bala, 1997, p. 258). Ten participants were required to obey non-custodial community supervision orders after completing their terms of custody, with an average probation disposition of approximately 389.3 days. With respect to the combination of both custody and probation, Bala (1997) noted that 730 days is the national average in Canada.

The following discussion indicates the primary reasons for the incarceration of the members of the respondent group. The findings revealed that 75% of the participants had been charged with multiple offences. These data were derived exclusively from institutional records and were classified into a nominal level of measurement. The participants' current convictions are presented in order of prevalence and include eight categories reflecting a broad range of *Canadian Criminal Code* offences. The following summarizes the aggregate of specific crimes committed by the participants: armed robbery (usually with a handgun or knife), 14 convictions; theft under $5,000, 9 convictions; breaking and entering, 5 convictions; wearing a disguise in the commission of an offence, 4 convictions; aggravated assault, 3 convictions; escaping custody and being unlawfully at large (UAL), 3 convictions; motor vehicle theft, 2 convictions; and other miscellaneous convictions such as accessory after the fact, highway traffic violations, and careless use of a firearm, 5 convictions.

The following provides specific information concerning the participants' criminal histories. The findings focus on five broad categories of crime: (a) sexual assault, (b) physical assault, (c) assault on an authority figure, (d), weapon use, and (e) escapes. The young offenders' criminal histories included not only previous offenses, but also most recent summary and indictable offences. These data were gathered from two sources, including interviews with the participants and institutional documents. No participants had engaged in extrafamilial or intrafamilial sexual assault; however, two-thirds of the participants indicated a prior history of physical assault and aggression towards others. Not surprisingly, developmental studies of delinquency suggested a strong connection between physical aggression during childhood and subsequent violent and antisocial behaviour (e.g., Haapasalo & Tremblay, 1994; Loeber, 1988; Moffitt, 1993; Stattin & Magnusson, 1989). In the present study, "antisocial behaviour" means aggressive and delinquent behaviour against societal norms (Loeber & Farrington, 1997; Stoff, Breiling, & Maser, 1997). Moreover, Hinshaw and Zupan (1997) noted that from a legal perspective, antisocial behaviour is often called "delinquency."

Institutional documents revealed that 2 of this study's participants had a history of assaultive behaviour towards authority figures. Ten of the 12 participants had criminal histories involving weapons convictions, several of which involved knives, high-calibre handguns, handguns with large ammunition capacities, and other types of firearms. Weapon use was reported to be most prevalent in more serious offences (indictable offences) such as store robberies. Additionally, 4 of the 12 participants had escaped, or attempted to escape, while in custody. Finally, the literature generally supports the suggestion that both assaultive behaviour towards authority figures and escaping custody may be clear indicators of both future subsequent aggression towards others and recidivism (e.g., Leschied et al., 1992).

Individual Characteristics of Participants

This section of Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of each participant's life in order to offer a composite sketch of the participants' personal, educational, and criminal backgrounds. The information presented here is descriptive in nature and is based on interview transcripts. The first letter of each pseudonym corresponds to both letter's place in the sequence of the alphabet and to the order in which the participants were interviewed (e.g., Andrew, Brent, Calvin). The next two chapters will expand upon these personal life stories in more detail.

Introduction to Andrew. Andrew was living on his own before incarceration and came from a family characterized by divorce. At age 7, Andrew was diagnosed as having an attention-deficit disorder and later attended numerous elementary schools. Andrew was studying at the general level before dropping out of school in Grade 9, and mentioned that he had no documented credits from "regular school." In custody, Andrew was studying Grade 10 English and geography and, when interviewed, had received one-quarter of a credit. Andrew had an extensive criminal record dating back several years, with multiple incarcerations. Andrew's plans included graduating from high school and pursuing a career in the Armed Forces.

Introduction to Brent. Brent was living with his father and stepmother before incarceration. Both parental figures were employed outside the home and worked full-time. Brent's mother resided with his natural siblings. His mother was also employed, and his siblings attended post-secondary institutions. According to Brent, he had minimal contact with his mother since leaving her home at age 13. Brent reported that he had enrolled in the general level of instruction before dropping out of school in Grade 9. Although Brent was a repeat offender, he had never been charged for a violent indictable offence. When released from secure custody, Brent planned to finish high school as a mature student and then study architecture or computer programming at college. He also noted an interest in exploring a career in the Armed Forces.

Introduction to Calvin. Calvin was living with several siblings and his father in a major metropolitan area before incarceration. He had experienced no major early problems academically, despite attending 10 different elementary schools. Calvin claimed to have completed 10 credits towards his secondary school diploma, several of which were apparently completed in custody. He had a lengthy criminal record and had spent a significant amount of time in both open and secure correctional facilities. His plans included completing his high school education and pursuing a career as either a computer programmer or an electrician.

Introduction to Daniel. Daniel resided with his natural mother and younger sibling before incarceration. When interviewed, Daniel said that another sibling was incarcerated in a correctional facility for adults. His father, brother, and maternal uncle all had lengthy criminal records. His father apparently abused alcohol, but maintained regular contact with his children. Daniel had previously obtained 8 credits in Grade 9 before dropping out of school. His criminal record dated from age 13 and consisted of 11 previous dispositions. Daniel said that he had no specific goals for the immediate future, preferring to wait for his sentence to end. However, he expressed a desire to finish high school, move on to college, then find employment, and save enough money to purchase a house.

Introduction to Ethan. Ethan reported that before incarceration, he was independent of the family home, existing by receiving welfare and committing criminal acts. He was living with his partner, who was attending a post-secondary institution. He came from a family characterized by divorce and had several siblings. He was an average student until Grade 8 when his drug problem began to affect his scholastic performance. He did, however, obtain all his Grade 9 credits before he dropped out of school. Ethan had a lengthy criminal record, and his offences were primarily motivated by the need to supply his drug habit. His immediate plans included getting several school credits during his lengthy incarceration. Ethan also mentioned that his long-range plans included continuing his education and pursuing a career as a social worker.

Introduction to Fraser. Fraser was living with a sibling and natural parents in a major metropolitan city before incarceration. The family lived in a tough, dangerous, and poor neighbourhood where crime and gang activity were prevalent. According to Fraser, his parents were happily married and both worked full-time. He experienced no early academic problems until Grade 7. In Grade 9, his problematic behaviour began to seriously affect his scholastic performance. He was, however, able to gain all his Grade 9 credits before dropping out of high school. Fraser was a first-time offender with no history of prior involvement with the law. His plans included completing both high school and community college. Fraser also noted that he wanted to pursue a diploma in dramatic arts.

Introduction to Greg. Greg's parents separated when he was age 4, and until incarceration, he remained with his mother and siblings. Greg explained that the dangerous neighbourhood where he lived placed him at risk for criminal behaviour. Until Grade 8, Greg experienced no major problems at school; however, he began having difficulties in his first year of high school and dropped out by the second semester. Greg reported that he was enrolled in the general level before leaving school and had accumulated 12 credits to date. Greg admitted that his criminal record dated back some 3 or 4 years and included 14 previous dispositions, several for very serious indictable offences. Greg's plans included finding part-time employment, returning to school on a full-time basis, and staying out of trouble.

Introduction to Hugh. Hugh was living on his own before incarceration. He came from a family with many problems, including financial difficulties and substance abuse by both parents. Hugh was studying at the general level in Grade 9 before dropping out and had obtained 11 high school credits to date. He wanted to obtain more credits during his lengthy incarceration, with his ultimate goal being to complete Grade 12. Hugh had an extensive young-offender record, including several previous convictions for escaping custody. When interviewed, he had not selected a career path, but noted a strong desire to secure employment in order to support his girlfriend and child.

Introduction to Ian. Ian was living on his own before incarceration and came from a family characterized by divorce. At the time of this interview, both his parents were supported by welfare. Ian described himself as an average and quiet student with few academic problems. He completed most of his education in large metropolitan cities where he transferred among a myriad of elementary schools before starting secondary school. He said that he had passed all his courses before Grade 10. He was presently studying a Grade 10 general-level history course and claimed he had achieved assignment marks in the 80 percentile range. Ian was a first-time Phase Two offender with one prior Phase One conviction for theft. His plans included completing high school and then moving on to either college or university, where he would like to study business. He mentioned that he might also like to be employed in the computer industry.

Introduction to Jack. Before Jack's detention, he resided at home with his family, consisting of his natural mother and several siblings. He came from a family characterized by violence, substance abuse, financial difficulties, and transiency. Jack was required to repeat Grade 1 because of behavioural difficulties and said that truancy and lack of interest resulted in his expulsion in Grade 10. Jack claimed he had completed 12 credits towards his high school diploma. He was a first-time Phase Two offender, with only one prior Phase One conviction for shoplifting. Jack said that after completing his sentence he would return home and try to regain admission into the high school system. Jack mentioned that his long-range plans included enrolling in community college and pursuing a career in drafting.

Introduction to Kyle. Kyle was living on his own before incarceration. He came from a family characterized by divorce and had few siblings. At the time of this interview, Kyle's father was self-employed while Kyle's mother was supported by welfare. Kyle caused few problems in school until Grade 7. In secondary school, his behaviour became progressively worse, and his marks began to decline. Frequent placements in treatment centres, and problematic behaviour, resulted in his dropping out of school in Grade 9. Kyle was studying at the basic level before leaving school and mentioned that he had accrued no academic credits to date. Kyle was a first-time Phase Two offender with only one prior Phase One conviction for breaking, entering, and theft. Kyle offered no real plans for the future, but said that he would complete high school and then, perhaps, move on to college. Further, he said that he wanted a job in sales.

Introduction to Leonard. Leonard was living with his father and a biological sibling before incarceration. He came from a family characterized by divorce and poverty. Leonard mentioned that he had no major difficulties in school until Grade 6. By the time Leonard reached high school, he had displayed behavioural and attendance problems. According to Leonard, he lost interest in school and was eventually expelled for absenteeism and other problematic behaviours. He reported that his young-offender record dated from age 13, and that his offences had become increasingly more serious over the years. Leonard was uncertain of where he would live after release from custody, but was quite certain he would return to school. Leonard also mentioned that his long-range plans included enrolling in community college and pursuing a career in the restaurant industry.

On their own, the data presented in Chapter 4 offer a cursory picture of the participants' personal, educational, and criminal backgrounds. Several categories stand out from the rest and will be dealt with in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Summary

Historically, three main approaches to juvenile justice have existed in Canada. Before the JDA, Canada had no legal structure in place to deal with juvenile delinquents and based its system of justice on the Crime Control Model. In contrast, the JDA, enacted in 1908, was premised on the Welfare Model of Crime. This model reflected an extreme ideological shift to the "left" and remained in place for three-quarters of a century. In 1981, the YOA was tabled in parliament and formally became law in 1984. The YOA was based on the Justice Model of Crime, which is based on the principles of crime prevention, legal rights, responsibility, accountability, protection of society, rehabilitation, alternative measures, minimal interference, and parental involvement. If one word could describe the YOA's underpinning philosophy, it would be "balance": balance between rights of the community and rights of the youth, between the Crime Control Model and the *parens-patriae* orientation of child welfare, between treatment and punishment, and between alternative measures and incarceration.

Despite this balancing act, the juvenile justice system in Canada retains many dispositional practices of the past. In fact, custodial dispositions have increased by 24% in the last 10 years, due to both the "get-tough" stance on young offenders and the surge in juvenile violent crimes. Custody appears to be the first option available for young persons found guilty of violent crimes or otherwise perceived to be a risk to the community. The harshest disposition that the courts can hand down is placement in a secure-custody detention facility. All participants in the present study fell into that category. On average, they were serving approximately 13.0 months of secure custody, almost four times higher than the national average. Most of the participants were recidivists with lengthy criminal records dating from Phase One convictions. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 18, and none of the older youths were scheduled for adult-transfer procedures. Just under one-half of the respondents described their parents' income as being in the medium range. The remaining 7 participants considered their family's income to be low, while no participants reported a high household income. Just under half of the participants reported living independently, and family dissolution between their natural parents was extremely common. Only 1 participant had any dependents. Finally, all the respondents had either dropped out of or been expelled from school. Seven had not completed their first year of high school; in contrast, the remaining five were in Grade 10 before leaving.

The fourth section of this chapter presented a brief profile of the participants. Their family, educational, and criminal histories implied the unstable nature of their lives. Before dropping out of school, 9 of this study's participants had been enrolled in the general level of study. Ten had accrued at least 2 high school credits before dropping out, the average being approximately 10 credits per youth. When interviewed, the participants were all enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility, taking an average of 4 courses. Before incarceration, all of the participants had experienced behavioural problems in school. Regardless, all expressed some degree of commitment to eventually returning to school. In fact, no participant reported a desire to end his education upon release from custody. Further, most participants intended to secure employment in a specific field. Finally, 7 participants maintained that they would most likely return to their parental homes upon release.

CHAPTER 5

A LIFE HISTORY PERSPECTIVE

This chapter presents the findings in relation to specific research question 2: What family background factors, if any, contributed to the participants dropping out of high school? The chapter is organized into two sections, the first of which uses a narrative format to describe the participants' lives. The stories reveal each participant's childhood, personality and family environment and were compiled from individual files and interviews with the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

The Participants' Stories

Andrew's Story

Andrew was born to a couple whose relationship was short-lived. His natural parents "were never married," nor did they establish a common-law relationship; the union ended when Andrew was still an infant. Andrew also said that his parents "dated for a while, and then [his] dad found out [Andrew's mother] was pregnant and he split." According to Andrew, his natural father never played a parental role in Andrew's formative years and "was a stranger in [his] life." When asked in an open-ended manner if he had ever met his natural father, he said: "I met my dad only once, when I was 12 years old--that is the only time I can remember." He added: "I don't talk to him." Andrew was aware of a half-sibling, but had never tried to contact him.

Andrew's mother married during his infancy and lived with her husband until Andrew was age 12, when the relationship ended. Coincidentally, this event occurred at approximately the same time that Andrew started resisting school rules and began getting into trouble with the law. This marital separation was extremely upsetting for Andrew, largely due to the positive sociable relationship he had developed with his stepfather. According to Andrew, they enjoyed each other's company and engaged in mutually enjoyable recreational activities. However, his stepfather's parenting skills were questionable, and his disciplinary practices were inconsistent. His parents disagreed on child-rearing philosophies and on consequences for Andrew's inappropriate behaviour. After the divorce, Andrew's mother "packed her belongings" and moved several hundred miles away.

Shortly after their relocation, Andrew's mother married again. Following the marriage, the family moved into a modest two-bedroom apartment located in the suburban core of a major city. Both parents worked full-time in service occupations and were "making a living and paying the bills." Andrew added: "Their income is not high, but it's not low either." He described himself as a "latchkey kid" because his parents left for work early in the morning and arrived home late in the evening. During their absence, Andrew exercised his independence and claimed self-sufficiency. Andrew went on to say that he got along with his mother "all right," and that his parents had a compatible relationship from the beginning. Andrew described his initial relationship with his second stepfather as understanding, supportive, and relatively friendly, but their friendliness was short-lived. Andrew explained that the stepfather was stern and soon instituted several household rules and regulations, acting in sharp contrast to the tendency of his first stepfather, who had allowed Andrew considerable latitude and autonomy. Although his second stepfather was strict, Andrew persisted in breaking the house rules: "I would come in late . . . three or four in the morning, and [my parents] would get mad. I would argue with my stepdad a lot." Because of this disobedient behaviour and his ongoing difficulties with the youth justice system, the relationship between Andrew and his surrogate father remained tenuous, although Andrew still noted that "he is all right."

When questioned directly about his stepfather's reaction to his problematic behaviour, Andrew paused momentarily and then explained that "[My stepfather] would be like my mom. He would stand by my mom, you know. He would say, 'You're messing up. I've been through this before, when I was your age,' and start lecturing me and stuff." Although Andrew's stepfather would "play the tough guy" at times, Andrew admitted that his parents were consistent in their approach to discipline and that they collaborated routinely: "They stand by one another all the time. Before they do something they will discuss it. It's not like my mom will say, 'Okay you do this,' and my stepdad says, 'You will do that.'" Andrew added: "They will both come together and say, 'We think that you should do this for your own good.'"

Andrew and his stepfather differed on child-rearing and disciplinary philosophies. His stepfather would not tolerate Andrew's disrespect and incorrigible behaviour, while Andrew perceived his surrogate father as an outsider who was not authorized to set limits or question his whereabouts. This stand-off caused his parents to seek the assistance of the local youth services. Andrew was subsequently placed in the care of a foster home where he resided for almost one year. Apparently, Andrew did quite well in the structured environment of a foster home. Andrew explained his behaviour this way:

> When I was on probation one time, I got arrested and I moved into this foster home cause my parents couldn't handle me no more, because I was getting into trouble. . . . They wanted to put me on a thing where I had to go to school. This truancy officer was always riding my ass too, you know. She was always telling me she was just going to charge me and shit. I went to school that whole time and I never got in trouble for that whole year.

Andrew returned home after his foster stay, but again presented difficulties for his parents. "After probation was gone, I started getting into trouble again," noted Andrew. He did not live up to their expectations, particularly in matters of school attendance, negative peer associations, anger management, marijuana use, and prolonged unannounced absences from home. Andrew would stay out all weekend without informing his parents of his whereabouts or of who his companions were. Feeling ineffective and unable to manage their son's behaviour, Andrew's parents requested him to relinquish the house keys. Afterwards, Andrew spent many nights on the streets when he had broken curfew. However, Andrew mentioned that he usually obeyed curfew on school nights:

> I didn't really break curfew on school nights. [My mother] wanted me home by at least 11 o'clock. She had to work early in the morning, and I respected her and

came home early, a lot of times like 9:30 or 10 o'clock.

Despite occasional compliance with house rules, Andrew's problematic behaviour persisted, and again, his mother sought the intervention of the local youth services. He was referred to a treatment centre for children and stayed for several months. This unsuccessful intervention ended prematurely, and Andrew then lived on his own in a youth hostel for a short time before returning home. He lived "common law" until his most recent term of incarceration. He added: "It was just me and my girlfriend."

Andrew was unsure where he would live when released from custody. At the time of the interview, Andrew wanted to return home upon completing his sentence, but because of his "arguments and stuff" and criminal lifestyle, he thought that this plan might not be viable. When asked directly if he liked being with his family, Andrew said: "I haven't been at home for a while to know. I've been in here for the last two years or so." Andrew declared that his release plans included enlisting in the Armed Forces and pursuing a career as an aircraft mechanic. He added: "Then I will have experience from the army, and then I can go out and find a job, and they will also pay for my tuition when I go to college. That way I will have those two things in my belt, you know."

Brent's Story

According to Brent, he was a "bully" during his early years, and he described himself as a stubborn and physically assertive youngster. He was random in his choice of targets, displaying behavioural problems in a wide range of personal and social contexts. He had a succession of overt and covert behavioural problems dating from his early years, including the destruction of school property. Brent bluntly remarked: "Yeah, I can remember breaking a computer in elementary school, stuff like that, you know." When Brent was 8, his natural parents separated, and he progressively began to exhibit behavioural problems at home and school. When asked if his natural parents' divorce had anything to do with him getting into trouble, he remarked: "That is what my mom told me." He was suspended from school several times and was admittedly "always fooling around and fighting." He believed that his overt aggressive and violent nature could be directly attributed to his parents' divorce and his chaotic early childhood years. Brent said that "I sorta lost it when my parents divorced. . . . Everything started happening ever since they broke up. It was a while ago now, but if you think about it, I really went down hill after that." Following the breakup, Brent, one of several children, remained with his mother and siblings.

Shortly after the divorce, his father remarried and had several children with his new wife. Brent said that he did not get along with his mother and talked back and disrespected her daily. After becoming *persona non grata* in his mother's home, he wanted to live with his father who resided in another province. When Brent was about 9, he became involved with the local social services agency due to his negative behaviour at school and home. He refused to follow his mother's rules and did not live up to her expectations, especially in the area of school. His behaviour became progressively worse, and at age 11, his mother placed him in a group home, where he was involved in extensive counselling for several months. Upon his return home, he continued to exhibit problematic behaviour and became increasingly hostile and verbally aggressive towards family members, particularly a younger sibling. By the time Brent was 13, he was too much for his mother to handle. Feeling unable to cope with his aggressive and truculent behaviour, she placed him in the care of his father and stepmother.

They both worked full-time and lived in a well-established suburban neighbourhood located in a medium-sized city. According to Brent, he and his father frequently argued over Brent's criminal activity, but he still considered his father to be permissive and extremely tolerant. Brent noted that "My father didn't really give me a curfew." He explained that his father feared losing their father-son relationship and consequently avoided confrontational issues: "I would stay out as late as I wanted. Like if I told them I would be back at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, that would be fine." Brent reported that he had a "good" relationship with his stepmother, but that she hassled him at times: "Yeah, I like my stepmother and even call her 'Mom', but she hassles me every once in a while . . . like 'Clean up your room, do this and do that.'" His stepmother was caring and supportive and rarely disciplined Brent, viewing discipline as his natural father's job. Her permissive and extremely tolerant parenting style may have been why Brent liked her. Brent said that he chose to end the relationship with his natural mother after moving in with his father, because Brent had negative feelings about being forced to leave her home and apparently did not speak with her for several years. As he put it: "She kicked me out to my dad's house. I had a grudge for five years. I just started talking to her last year."

Soon after Brent moved to his father's home, his behaviour became problematic. He did not obey the house rules set by his father, began to hang out with youths of questionable character, got into trouble with the law, and subsequently served several open-custody dispositions. When asked if his friends had been a bad influence on him he said: "Yeah, they're real dopers. They like to do criminal activity. I don't do drugs, but my friends do marijuana, drink and smoke. They've been caught for B & E's and stuff, but I got it worse than them." Brent's initial custodial dispositions were not successful, and he experienced many problems, in sharp contrast to his most recent custodial disposition, to which, he responded favourably. He said that he had "matured a lot over the last few years," adding that he would no longer participate in criminal activity because he did "not want an adult criminal record."

Brent was a competitive athlete who denied any drug or alcohol use. He said that before being in secure custody, he worked full-time in a shop specializing in his sport. He also recalled that he was employed part-time by several other companies and "worked off and on" for his father's business when needed. Brent further noted, "I never depended on [my parents] for money." Upon release from custody, Brent intends to avoid crime and return to his sporting activities. It appeared that Brent's relationship with his natural mother had improved considerably since his incarceration. At the time of interviewing, Brent was corresponding with her weekly and reported maternal visitations: "Mom drove 6 hours to see me last week. I get along with her now. We were apart for five years, but it's fine now." Brent said that he wants to secure employment with his former employer and return to school by way of "the mature student route." He also noted a desire to secure employment with the "Canadian Armed Forces" someday.

Calvin's Story

Calvin's parents were both in their second significant relationship and had numerous children from their previous unions. Evidently, both parents had criminal records, and at the time of interviewing, his mother and father were collecting "UI" and "Workman's Compensation," respectively. His parents had a turbulent and violent common-law relationship. They had separated many times, but despite this unstable union, they had several children, with Calvin being the middle child. Calvin's parents lived together for 12 years until he was approximately 7 years old. At this juncture, the relationship disintegrated. Mother and children then moved into an apartment complex in the downtown core of a large city. "We did not have a lot of money at the time. My mom raised the four of us all by herself in a little apartment," explained Calvin.

After the marital separation, Calvin's father resisted any contact with his ex-wife and rarely visited the children: "Well, we tried to see our dad. It was an on-and-off thing, you know, mostly off, though. My mom always tried to encourage us to have some kind of communication." When Calvin was about 11, his mother entered her third significant relationship, and according to Calvin, he got along well with his new surrogate father, but "The marriage lasted only one year." Calvin added:

> Me and him got along all right, but he was lazy, you know. I wasn't used to seeing a lazy man in the house. My real dad was always working and stuff, until he got hurt at work. But when it came to social stuff, like taking me and my brothers out, that was all right.

Before the mother's second marriage, the children relocated to their natural father's home. However, they returned to their mother's apartment within one year following the separation. "Before I came here I lived with my father for a little while.

But I was brought up by my mother," noted Calvin. Calvin started displaying behavioural problems in a wide range of personal and social contexts upon returning to his mother's home. Reflecting on the past, Calvin denied any adverse effects in dealing with his mother's separation. Further, when asked if his natural parents' divorce had anything to do with him getting into trouble, he said: "No, when stuff like that happened in my life, I just blocked it out and can't remember it, so I can't remember feeling anything. Well, it might have some kind of effect, but nothing major."

At home, Calvin refused to help around the house, rebelled against his mother's rules, and accepted no responsibility for his actions. When asked how his mother handled his problematic behaviour, Calvin said: "She dealt with it with three smacks on the ass." When asked if he came from a family characterized by family violence, he suggested that he did: "There was physical violence by my father towards my mom. Between me and my father and the kids, there was a lot of verbal abuse, but my father never touched us." At school, he lacked motivation, rarely completed homework assignments, and skipped class regularly. When asked what his mother thought about his problematic school behaviour, Calvin responded rather suddenly, "She argued, grounded, and talked to me." He added: "She pretty well did as much as she could do. I wasn't hearing her, I was just too closed-minded, you know."

Calvin said that he "really started getting into serious trouble in junior high school." He added: "It was around Grade 8 when I started getting a record. Grade 8 was the first time I actually got incarcerated, I met a lot of bad people there and hung out with a few." When probed on the topic of jail and friends, Calvin said that "When you go to jail, you have a million people telling you how to do this and how to do that, but they never tell you how to get away with it, though." He concluded: "That is why they are there right beside you." Calvin attributed many of his early problems not only to his choice of companions, but to the area in which he lived: "Yeah, I lived in a bad area of [city name omitted]. Like where I lived there was always bad influences. You know, I always lived in pretty rough areas of town, [street name omitted] and [street name omitted] and areas like that." This explanation was reinforced by a document stating that Calvin "resides in a neighbourhood which has a reputation for antisocial youth gangs and violence."

Calvin professed that his mother was emotionally distant from him during his early teens. When probed on this topic further, Calvin said: "Something happened at home, you know." He elaborated: "My mom was going through some changes. She was going to counselling and stuff, so she wasn't there as much. I guess I kinda acted out to grab her attention, I guess you could say." Nonetheless, Calvin still described the relationship in positive terms, commenting that "I liked living with my mother. . . . Me and my mom have an excellent relationship."

By the time Calvin was 16, he was involved in the youth justice system, becoming uncontrollable and associating with highly delinquent peers. As a result, his mother placed him in the care of his natural father, even though he did not have a particularly good relationship with Calvin. In fact, Calvin mentioned that he rarely talked with his father. His father was living common-law at the time and apparently continued to abuse alcohol; however, Calvin claimed no major problems with his father during this period, but did continue to get into trouble. A complicating factor in Calvin's problematic behaviour was the traumatic death of a sibling with whom Calvin was quite close. This trauma is evident from the following remark: "One of my older sisters passed away a while ago. It was hard on me, my sisters [names omitted] and my father; it was hard on all of us."

Calvin professed that it was during this time of distress that he befriended members of a youth gang and became a member himself: "They were a bad influence on me, you know. When it came to school, yeah, they were definitely a bad influence, but when it came to street life, they taught you a lot, you know." He added: "There was probably one or two in school, but the majority were dropouts." However, Calvin claimed he had broken away from the gang members: "I liked being with them. I considered them part of my family, but I am not going to socialize with them too much anymore." Further, Calvin denied any use of tobacco or drugs but did mention that he consumed alcohol on a purely social level. When asked what he wanted to be doing in five years, he said: "Well, my main objective is to graduate from high school and then become an electrician or computer programmer. With the help of the teachers here [the correctional facility], I can kinda see now that I have the potential to go find that life."

Daniel's Story

Daniel was the second of several children born into a volatile relationship marked by family violence, alcoholism, and poverty. In his formative years, Daniel had little structure and discipline in his life. He expressed defiance through temper tantrums, noncompliance, and power struggles, and by the time he was 8, was having bitter verbal confrontations with his mother. In addition, he had problems relating to authority figures outside the household: "I was just a little prick when I was younger. I would mouth off to teachers and adults and people like that, you know." He added: "My behaviour was not violent back then, just a bad attitude I guess." Daniel was, in fact, rarely disciplined as a child and had total autonomy to make his own decisions: "My mom was lenient when I was younger. There weren't too many rules that I had to follow. She would tell me to be in at a certain time, but I didn't follow her rules." He added: "Sometimes I would phone her at 4 o'clock in the morning and tell her, 'I am not coming home.'"

Daniel had few positive male role models in his life to compensate for his mother's questionable parenting skills. He did, however, mention that his father is "strict" because "he has crappy rules." Apparently, his natural father, maternal uncle, and older brother all had significant criminal histories, as did his mother's subsequent partners. In fact, at the time of interviewing, Daniel said that his older brother was is "in adult jail right now doing time." He finished: "My other brother is also headed there. He fights and stuff all the time. He doesn't get charged or nothing, though."

Daniel's parents lived common-law until he was almost 9 years old. According to Daniel, the family was supported by welfare and lived in relative poverty. After years of suffering physical and emotional abuse, Daniel's mother ended the relationship, taking the children with her. Judicial complications surrounded the separation, and apparently, Daniel's mother was forced to secure a restraining order against her former partner. From that point onward, Daniel's natural father did not play a paternal role in his life and had only tenuous contact until Daniel was approximately 15 years old. Daniel suggested that he and his siblings experienced various degrees of abuse by their father. "My dad gets pretty violent when he is drinking and stuff." He added: "Like when I was a kid, I had to live with him for a while and he would get mad at me and get violent sometimes and argue with me and stuff, so I would just ignore him and walk away." When asked directly, "Does your father have a drinking problem?", Daniel answered succinctly: "Yeah, he is an alcoholic." Despite his father's abusive tendencies, Daniel mentioned that he "made contact with him a while ago" and will continue to visit him on the weekends, when Daniel "get[s] out of jail." On the topic of abuse, Daniel noted that his mother also experienced abuse from subsequent partners.

Following his parents' common-law separation, the family moved several times due to financial difficulties. Around this time, one of Daniel's grandparents died unexpectedly. Within a few days of his grandparent's death, another close relative died, leaving Daniel without much support at home. This period was a particularly stressful time for Daniel, owing to the close relationship he had with both relatives. Daniel recounted that soon after the separation of his parents and the death of his grandparent, he started getting in trouble by throwing rocks at vehicles and vandalizing property. His sibling also got into trouble at this time and was placed in a group home. Daniel's mother then sought assistance from several child welfare agencies, including the local youth services. Daniel was referred to several of these agencies, but missed appointments routinely, citing other commitments.

Daniel's offences became progressively worse over the years, and by the time he was in his late teens, he had been incarcerated in secure-custody settings more than six times. He also mentioned that he had established a history of poor relations with authority figures, including the police and teachers. Daniel commented that he "just didn't like school." He found the academic environment frustrating and boring and was disrespectful towards teachers. Daniel did not particularly like teachers always telling him what he had to do. Daniel suggested, however, that his troubles with authority figures tended to occur when he was "drinking or smoking dope."

When asked in an open-ended manner if he ever abused drugs or alcohol, Daniel responded rather curtly, "Yeah, both." When probed on the topic of drugs, Daniel sighed as he leaned back in his chair: "Let me see, my drug of choice was hash and pot, but I did acid a couple of times also, but was usually drunk when I was doing drugs." On the topic of alcohol, Daniel said that several family members were heavy drinkers. Daniel himself had a history of alcohol abuse and alleged that he had his first drink when he was about 10 years old and in the company of an adult family member. However, his mother did not approve of his alcohol consumption and would get irate when he came home drunk. "She gave me shit every time she caught me drinking and got real mad," Daniel explained. He concluded: "She said if she caught me drinking, she was going to phone the cops on me."

Daniel asserted that by his early teens, he drank heavily and regularly and often experienced blackouts. He professed that alcohol played a significant roll in all his illegal activities. Invited to discuss how and where he obtained his financial resources to buy alcohol, he bluntly remarked: "I would steal cars and go through them for money and stuff." Apparently, every time Daniel drank alcohol, he "would end up in some kind of shit." Despite probation orders prohibiting consumption or possession of alcohol, he still had frequent drinking binges, which were usually followed by judicial interventions. In fact, Daniel most recently got drunk and committed several armed robberies with an adult relative, resulting in his current term of custody. Before his offences, Daniel was attending a substance-abuse program, although he was unable to follow through with the counselling due to incarceration.

At the time of the interview, Daniel was enrolled in the academic program at the detention facility and was awaiting admission to a drug-treatment program. Daniel suggested that he had no specific goals for the immediate future, preferring to see how his sentence went. However, he expressed a desire to finish high school, move on to college, find employment in the construction field, then save enough money to purchase a house. When asked what he had learned about himself since being incarcerated, he said: "I learned that I was an idiot when I was out. I just realize all the things I was doing wrong, and I'm going to patch them up when I get out of here."

Ethan's Story

Ethan's parents were both in their second significant relationship. Ethan's mother had children from her first relationship, and his father had none. Ethan was the second child born into this marriage. When Ethan was 1, his parents separated and divorced a short time later. After the separation, Ethan's mother assumed custody of all the children, who remained in her care for approximately two years. Ethan's father then assumed custody because his mother apparently could no longer cope with the children. From that point onward, his mother did not play a maternal role in his life and had only tenuous contact. Ethan described his natural mother as a person who is a "liar, drug addict, and has multiple personalities."

Ethan was 3 years old when his father met with a former girlfriend. They soon married and had a child of their own. The family moved to a small town where his parents had to commute to work. Ethan's stepmother soon quit her job to look after the children on a full-time basis. The family lived in a three-bedroom house in a well-established neighbourhood where the children attended a newly erected school. Ethan's stepmother and father were both high school graduates with postsecondary credentials. The marriage was extremely stable, and his "parents got along pretty good," though Ethan reported incidents of abuse: "There was both verbal and physical abuse by my mother and by my father before he passed away." Ethan added, "I have a brother that I used to fight with a lot also." Despite the apparent abuse, Ethan adapted comfortably to the new maternal figure in his life and presented little or no problematic behaviour although he was hyperactive at times.

When Ethan was almost 8, his father died of a terminal illness, and his stepmother legally adopted him and his siblings. As a single parent, Ethan's stepmother carried on raising the children for approximately three years. When Ethan was 11, his adoptive mother remarried, and the family subsequently moved several times. His new surrogate father brought into the relationship a son who was in his late teens. The marriage was unstable from the beginning, explained Ethan: "It didn't work out at all. It was a short-term thing and lasted for only 6 months." The marriage disintegrated due to apparent abuse by Ethan's stepfather: "Yes, there was quite a bit of violence and abuse, you know. There was both verbal and physical abuse all the time." Although abuse was also directed towards the children, they still developed a strong attachment to their stepfather. After the separation, Ethan and his siblings lived with their maternal parent. His stepfather resisted any contact from the family and refused to pay child support. Ethan suggested that he preferred to have no contact with this person in any event because "He is a loser and an asshole." According to Ethan, the family was supported by Family Benefits and "did not have a lot of money." The family then relocated to a smaller house, which just happened to be near Ethan's natural grandparents. Ethan adjusted well to his new surroundings and developed a particularly close relationship with his grandfather, who adored and spoiled him. Ethan's grandfather was his anchor in a very fractured and unstable environment. One year later, his grandfather unexpectedly died in front of him.

Within a relatively short period, Ethan experienced the traumatic loss of three paternal figures, two of them from death. Ethan and his brother began to exhibit problematic behaviour including depression, disobedience, truancy and delinquency. "I started getting into trouble, nothing major or serious though, just petty stuff," said Ethan. Just as Ethan was approaching adolescence, he began using drugs and alcohol. When asked if he started using drugs and alcohol to a greater extent in high school, Ethan responded forcefully: "Oh, yeah." Alcohol and drug problems persisted, and eventually he received professional help. Ethan further noted that the treatment "helped a little bit but not a lot."

Ethan was overtly defiant, rebellious, and uncooperative at home and at school by the time he was 13, and his stepmother had effectively lost control of him. His problematic behaviour caused her to obtain assistance from several community and social service agencies. Also during this time, Ethan came to the attention of the youth justice system and was subsequently placed on probation for several thefts. "The main reason I stole was for money. I needed money, so I had to steal," Ethan said. Coincidentally, it was around this time that his sibling was sentenced to several months open custody for a series of crimes. By all accounts, Ethan was not a particularly strong student in school, and his already poor academic performance began to deteriorate severely by the time he was 14.

Following his academic failure, alcohol and drug abuse, disruptions at home, frequent moves, legal problems, lack of interest in school, and truancy, Ethan dropped out of high school in Grade 10: "I just didn't like school. Back then I found school to be boring and a waste of time. I had better things to do with my time than listen to a bunch of teachers all day." Around this time, Ethan moved out of his mother's house against her wishes and stayed with friends who were a negative influence and also well known to police. When asked if his friends had anything to do with his dropping out of school, he said: "Yeah, probably, because they were out having fun and I wanted to join them." Ethan recalled that he left home when he "was about 14 or 15 years old" due to explosive altercations between himself and his siblings and verbal conflicts with his adoptive stepmother. He added: "My mom had a curfew, but I didn't live by it. This created problems, I just had enough of people telling me what to do all the time, so I just left." Since then, Ethan engaged in a rather transient lifestyle, living with friends, girlfriends and relatives, besides living on the streets and being in custody. Ethan said that he was, in fact, supported by welfare and crime and has come into contact with the youth justice system "more times than [he cares] to remember."

When asked if moving out of his mother's home had anything to do with his getting into trouble, he said: "Yeah, I suppose it did. I don't know for sure, but I think so." At the time of the interview, Ethan was serving a lengthy secure-custody sentence for several indictable offences. He said that his plans included collecting student welfare and returning to school. He added: "You need to have school these days, but more important, I have to stop doing criminal activity."

Fraser's Story

Fraser was the second of several children born into his parents' marriage. He described his formative years in positive terms and noted that he "got along great" with his parents. Fraser was a cheerful and happy-go-lucky child who originated from a solid and stable environment. When asked if he perceived his parents as loving and actively involved in his life, Fraser responded succinctly: "Yeah." Those early years were uneventful with no reported incidents of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and no record of criminal involvement by Fraser or any family members. He contended that his parents were happily married and that both worked throughout his life. Fraser's father worked full-time in a small company, roughly a 30-minute commute to work, at a position held for several years. His mother also worked full-time in a large company within walking distance of home, a career path she also pursued for many years. Fraser further noted that his mother's income was "medium, I guess" and that his father's income was "probably low."

The family lived with relatives in a quiet suburban community until Fraser was about age 5, then moved into the core of a major city. Fraser described this neighbourhood as tough and dangerous, where drugs were frequently sold on the streets and where gang activity was commonplace. The neighbourhood, however, also had several advantages. For example, it was close to his mother's workplace, walking distance to the high school, and near the downtown. As well, housing was quite affordable in this area. Because of the rough and violent neighbourhood that the family lived in, the parents were overprotective of their children and would accompany them everywhere. Further, Fraser noted that when he was "young" his parents forced him to do homework on a regular basis: "I told them I didn't want to do homework no more and stuff, but they just resisted." Asked if his parents were strict or lenient, Fraser said, as his voice trailed off, "Lenient because if I get in trouble they wouldn't . . . " He concluded: "They would give me the lecture and stuff but then a week later, they will forget about it."

Unfortunately, Fraser grew up in a neighbourhood where exposure to negative influences and criminal elements such as gangs was commonplace and unavoidable. Fraser remarked that he came from a neighbourhood that was "an unsafe place to live . . . with drugs being sold everywhere." Apparently, peer pressure and environmental factors were motivators in his criminal involvement. Fraser noted that he "like[d] hanging out" with his friends. When asked directly, "What were your friends like?", Fraser replied: "Well, some of them have drug habits. We have a lot in common. Most of us are from the same country and the same culture and we can relate to that stuff, you know."

After Fraser was admitted to high school, his parents became more lenient and decided to give him more freedom, allowing him to travel on the bus by himself and to associate with his friends. When asked if his parents were controlling, Fraser said, "My father, no. My mother is more controlling. She is the one who would stay on me. She would make me stay on track and stuff." He added: "My dad, he would question me but not really be too much interested. He is like one of these cool dads, he is into sports and stuff like that." On the topic of sports, Fraser considered himself to be a good athlete who excelled in baseball and basketball. Unfortunately, good grades in school did not come so easily. Fraser was never a strong student, and by the end of Grade 9, his performance at high school began to deteriorate rapidly, and he "unofficially" dropped out during the first semester of Grade 10.

Throughout the course of his teenage years, Fraser began to test the limits of his parents' authority but maintained a fairly good rapport with them. When asked who made most of the decisions in his life, he said, "We both do." However, he noted that he usually ignored his parents' curfews. When asked in an open-ended manner to provide details about his weekend curfews, Fraser appeared amused with the question: "They try to tell me to come home early, like 2 o'clock. If I go to a club I usually come home at 3 o'clock, I never really follow their curfew." When asked what his parents thought about him breaking curfew, Fraser responded rather curtly, "They will be sleeping." He added: "But I have to tell them where I am going, I can't just go there." A theme that emerged from the interview and document review was that Fraser's parents had been somewhat naive and unsuspecting. By the time Fraser started high school, his parents thought their worries and problems were over.

According to Fraser, "Four cops came knocking one early Saturday morning." The unsuspecting problem Fraser's parents faced clearly caused them stress, anxiety, "heartbreak," and "sorrow." Fraser further commented: "It hurts my mother a lot that I am in jail, but she knows it is only for a year or so." Under direct questioning, Fraser stated that "This was my first offence." Nevertheless, he acknowledged, "It was a big offence." Fraser admitted that he, in retrospect, "felt bad about the whole thing" and felt "somewhat remorseful" for the victim and the victim's family. Before Fraser's court appearance and as part of his bail condition, he was required to return to high school on a full-time basis. Immediately following his return to the academic environment, he was placed on a contract by school administration and monitored closely on a daily basis. This intervention seemed to succeed. Fraser said: "I passed all my subjects, and I did like 70s and stuff like that in school."

Fraser said that he had settled into the secure-custody facility and did not foresee any problems, although he admitted to being lonesome, homesick, and at times scared. He added: "At the beginning when I first started my incarceration it was difficult, but as time went on I got use to it. But I still miss my family." Fraser said that his family remained supportive through his whole ordeal and has encouraged him to return home upon completion of his sentence. When asked what he wanted to do with his life, Fraser said that "Actually, I don't know yet. Graduation from high school is my first goal, then probably I will go to college. I want to go to college for sure, but I just don't know for what yet, maybe dramatic arts."

Greg's Story

Greg was born to a couple whose relationship was described as supportive and caring. Greg was the third of several children born into his parents' marriage and was generally a happy and contented child. When Greg was about age 4, his parents separated, and the children went to live with their mother. When asked directly, "How long have your parents been separated?", Greg stated: "As long as I can remember. They split when I was around four years old." Apparently, his parents separated amicably and remained in positive communication with one another. Except for several elementary school suspensions, Greg's formative years were relatively uneventful with no reported incidents of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. However, Greg said that he did get "backhands every now and then." He added: "I would get the beats for discipline and stuff. Not like knocking me out or anything, just corrective stuff."

Greg's mother assumed full custodial rights of all children following the divorce, and the family moved several times for financial reasons. The family was poor, and according to Greg, his mother's income was "low" because "she stays home, she has all the kids." When Greg was age 5, his mother entered her second significant relationship, and this union produced additional children. According to Greg, his mother was not employed outside the household: "I think she collects mother's allowance or something like that." Further, his stepfather was periodically employed doing "odd jobs." Except for his surrogate father, Greg got along well with all family members despite the number of people living in the household. In fact, the bond among siblings was reported to be extremely strong, as Greg described his oldest sister as his "best friend." He concluded: "I get along with my mom and my brothers and sisters."

Greg was age 6 when his natural father remarried. His father's new wife brought into the relationship a number of children from a previous union, and his father and his family soon moved out of the area. Although Greg's father maintained regular telephone and written contact with him, he never played a parental role in Greg's life: "I don't know what it is like to have my real father in the house, so I guess I don't miss it." Greg added, "My mother is loving and involved in my life, but I just view my dad as caring, but not actively involved in my life." When asked directly, "How do you get along with your father?", Greg answered rather hurriedly: "I do and I don't." After an eight-year hiatus, his father returned and settled in the same neighbourhood that he had departed from. Greg said that he started to visit his father on occasion, especially when in need of something. However, he did not like the fact that his father was beginning to play a paternal role in his life, and Greg also resented the fact that his father "was not there for him" as a child. As he said

> I just don't like him because, I don't know, we came down here from [country omitted]. Him and my mom got divorced, he went back to [country omitted] for like say 10 years, and then he came back when I was, like, 14. So I never knew this guy, and he is coming back telling me he is my dad, and what I should and should not do.

On the topic of relationships, Greg noted some difficulties with his stepfather, but described them as trivial. The two avoided any sort of interaction and rarely spoke to one another: "Yeah, I get along with my mom really good, but not really good with my stepdad. Me and my mom have an open relationship and I tell her lots of stuff, you know." Evidently, when Greg was younger he followed curfew, helped out around the house, and presented no problems at home or at school. Greg also noted that he was generally a good student and son "up until Grade 8." He also recalled, however, that his mother could be overprotective at times. During the interview, Greg's comments left no doubt about his mother's behaviour: "If she could, she would follow me to school every day and all of that. Just to make sure that I am staying out of trouble."

Greg spent his spare time either playing organized baseball at the Recreation Centre or "hanging out" with his friends. He enjoyed sports of all types, but particularly enjoyed swimming and riding his mountain bike. About age 14, Greg began to misbehave and started displaying problematic behaviour at home and in the community. When asked directly, "How old were you when you started getting into trouble?", Greg said, "I was about 14 years old when I started hanging out with the gang." Until that point, Greg did not have a history of negative or criminal conduct. Greg recalled that as an adolescent, he was treated permissively, and few limits were set even though his mother could be overprotective: "How late can I stay out at night? Well, it depends. How late does my mom want me to stay out, and how late I stay out are two different things, you know." On the other hand, Greg was quick to point out that his parents were strict at times, especially his stepfather: "If I mouthed off to my dad, he would throw me off the balcony. So, no I don't verbally abuse my dad--or mom neither, she would hit me with something."

Until Grade 8, Greg experienced no major problems at school; however, he began having difficulties in his first year of high school and officially dropped out by the end of the first semester. "In Grade 9, I went to like twenty of each class, and then I just stopped going. So maybe I was there a month or so." He finished: "I got charged and then I didn't go back to school after that." When probed further on the topic, Greg cited gang and drug-related factors as pivotal forces in his decision to quit school: "Gangs was a big reason for dropping out of school and I was also selling drugs." Asked what his friends thought of this lifestyle, Greg said: "What could they say, they were doing the same thing." He concluded: "I would say about 70% of them were dropouts. . . . Out of 50, maybe 10 have criminal records. We don't really get arrested that much because we don't go and do other stuff like other people."

By the time he was 15, Greg was not in school and was associating with friends who were well-known to police for their criminal activities: "Once I quit school I would wake up at, say, 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock and go outside and make some money selling drugs on the block." Besides selling illegal drugs on the "block," a euphemism for city streets, Greg also smoked marijuana regularly, "at least three times per day," although he denied alcohol abuse. Greg explained that the dangerous neighbourhood where he lived placed him at risk for criminal behaviour and admitted that he "just started getting into big time trouble."

At the time of interviewing, Greg noted that his criminal record was extensive and that he had committed several very serious offences. He said that his plans included moving back to his mother's home, staying out of trouble, finding part-time employment, and returning to school full-time. He added: "I know I can change if I want to. The thing is, will I be able to? I have it all planned out, it's just if the plan will work."

Hugh's Story

Hugh's natural parents formed a common-law union when they were teenagers, his mother and father being respectively in their middle and late teens. Hugh stated: "My parents are separated from one another. They were never married." Hugh was the sole child born into an environment fraught with several problems, including substance abuse by both parents and incessant fighting. These conflicts were exacerbated because Hugh's father perceived his common-law partner to be a terrible parent. This relationship disintegrated when Hugh was quite young, in part, due to his father's jail sentence.

Hugh and his mother eventually moved to a neighbouring city. Hugh's mother eventually entered another relationship resulting in marriage and children. Hugh's first three years were rather unstable and chaotic, and his natural parents may have lacked the necessary skills to be effective parents. Hugh went from one parent to the other and experienced at least three brief placements with the local child services. When asked in an open-ended manner to provide details about his parents' disciplinary interventions, Hugh responded bashfully: "If I did something I would get a spanking or something." Hugh's mother eventually obtained custodial rights through the courts, and he remained in her care for several years afterwards. Hugh's mother had very little contact with her former common-law partner from that point onward.

Conflicts with his mother and stepfather surfaced when Hugh was age 12. Hugh had been led to believe that his stepfather was his real father but learned about his true lineage through reading an entry in his mother's diary. This news was shocking and upsetting for Hugh and apparently caused a great deal of confusion for him. When his mother attempted to deny the allegations, Hugh vacated his mother's premises and went to live with his natural father, whom Hugh had not seen since infancy. He explained: "I lived with my mother and my stepfather until I was 12, and then I moved to my dad's. I had enough of their lying and stuff, and besides I wanted to move to the city." He added: "I still get along with my stepdad--he is not a bad guy. I still call him 'dad' and he calls me 'son.'"

Hugh maintained that initially, he did quite well at his father's house, developing a positive relationship with his stepmother, half-siblings and natural father. "We would sit down and watch a hockey game every now and then. We would also go fishing, and he would really try to be a father," said Hugh. He added, "He didn't know how to do it, but I guess he tried his best." However, Hugh's good relationship with his natural father did not last. His father began to introduce corrective and restrictive rules into the home, and Hugh started to rebel. Hugh recalled that "The first couple of times I came in late, he was grounding me and stuff, but then he didn't know how to be a father in the first place, because I hadn't seen him in twelve years." Hugh recalled that eventually, a wave of resentment and hostility towards his father emerged, and Hugh started "getting into trouble."

Hugh began running away from home and performing other harmful actions such as stealing from stores and cars, using "soft" and "hard" drugs, skipping school, and associating with negative peers. Attempted disciplinary interventions had been unsuccessful. Lecturing, removal of privileges, curfews, grounding, and other sanctions were ignored. His blatant defiance in the home and disrespect for authority figures forced his father to place him in the care of the local youth services, which was followed by a stay in a foster home. Hugh reacted negatively to both interventions; consequently, they had limited corrective results. Also during this period, Hugh became involved in the youth justice system, at first being directed to alternative measures and then to the traditional judicial response of custody. Hugh noted that once he started getting in trouble with the law, his parents "sorta backed off." He explained their response as follows:

> They were normal--not too lax or not too strict--when I was growing up, you know. When I started to get into trouble, it seemed like they were getting stricter, but it was just me that was getting worse. Then once I was getting old enough to make my own choices, then they just backed off and said 'It is your life.'

In discussing his reasons for getting into trouble, Hugh did not feel doing so was totally his parents' fault, but instead blamed his behaviour partially on his relocation to the city: "I started getting into trouble when I moved to the city. Soon as I moved to my dad's place when I was 12, I started getting into trouble." He added, "I didn't like this guy [father] either, so he couldn't tell me what to do, that was probably a reason also." Hugh also noted the connection between getting into trouble and dropping out of school: "Well, I quit school three or four times when I was in open custody. I would AWOL from open and would be on the run from authorities, so I couldn't show up at school." When asked if he obtained any Grade 10 credits, he said, "No, I wasn't there long enough. When I finally got to Grade 10, I was doing good, but then I awoled from open custody again and never did go back to that school."

At the time of the interview, Hugh was serving a lengthy secure-custody sentence. He was a repeat offender who had an extensive criminal background including a wide spectrum of offences. He viewed his most recent disposition as extreme, and accordingly, had filed an appeal under Section 16(9) of the YOA. Hugh said: "I got two years plus two years concurrent, that is just doing the same sentence over, you know." He finished, "I tried to appeal it, and I guess it's still trying to be appealed. It's still on the books, but my lawyer said, I got what I should have got. I don't care, I'm still going to appeal." Although his mother was no longer married, Hugh professed that he still maintained regular phone contact with his stepfather. When probed on the topic of his parents' separation, Hugh responded rather curtly: "They were together for 12 years and they just didn't get along, so they broke up." Furthermore, Hugh said that he did not expect visits from any parental figures due to serious financial problems and the distances involved in travelling. He contended that his plans following incarceration included completing high school and securing employment. He further stated:

> If I get what I'm hoping for when I go for my review in February, I hope to get into [city name omitted] and do open custody there. Then I am going to get this job with my aunt at a travel agency, making like three hundred bucks a week. I really want to get some start-up money before I get into school again. I also have a [age omitted] old son to support, and I am thinking of him more than anything right now.

Ian's Story

Ian grew up in a middle-class family where both parents were initially employed in blue-collar occupations. Ian was born to a couple whose relationship was normal and caring. His early years were uneventful with no reported incidents of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. When asked if he had ever experienced or witnessed family violence, Ian shook his head from side to side and said: "Nah, I came from a normal family when I was younger, just the regular discipline and stuff." Ian was a timid and reticent child who followed parental direction. Ian's father strongly desired to succeed financially; consequently, the family often moved to take advantage of lucrative job opportunities. Consequently, Ian attended 10 different elementary schools before entering high school. However, for the most part, Ian was raised in a small city bordering a large metropolitan area.

Ian's father was apparently a strict disciplinarian who applied rigid rules in raising his son. Ian perceived his father as an overly restrictive and sometimes "controlling" individual with high expectations and standards for himself and others: "My father can be controlling at times. He always wanted me to go to [sport name omitted], and go to school, and do good. He was controlling, but mostly in a good way," professed Ian. His father was a talented and successful athlete who excelled in sports. Ian emulated his father's athletic accomplishments and was, in fact, determined to succeed himself. Ian's high degree of self-discipline, commitment and ambition in his chosen sport earned him a reputation as a fierce and competitive athlete. When asked directly, "Are you going to get back into [sport name omitted] when released?", Ian answered quietly: "Hopefully. I think I want to do school first, because with [sport name omitted] you have to focus on it a lot."

When Ian was about 16, the family moved to another province for employment-related reasons. Apparently, his father pursued an exceptionally risky business venture which failed. Ian was not interested in discussing how he felt during this difficult time; however, he did say that moving to "[province name omitted] was a mistake." According to Ian, his father declared bankruptcy and began to gamble excessively. Ian also noted that both parents began collecting social assistance, could not preserve their high standard of living and came under considerable pressure. Financial hardships soon affected the family, and his father became verbally abusive when his gambling practices were unsuccessful. Ian recalled that his father's "gambling addiction" caused "many problems between my mom and dad." Because of these stresses, his parents decided to separate and Ian remained in the maternal home. "When they were together, they were always arguing. . . . It was stressful on me when they got divorced," explained Ian. He went on to say that his parents' separation and "all the stress together, man" probably had something to do with his propensity towards criminal activities. He added: "That divorce is probably one of the reasons I am in here."

During this emotionally turbulent time, Ian began to test the limits of his mother's authority, but noted that he "still respected her." When asked directly, "Is your mother strict?", Ian responded concisely: "No." When asked in an open-ended manner to provide details about his weekend curfew, Ian replied: "I have to be in by 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock." However, Ian was quick to point out that he rarely complied with weekend curfews: "I follow the weeknight rules and curfews, there is nothing to do on a weeknight. But I don't come home all weekend." Around the beginning of Grade 10, Ian became involved with peers who were involved in unproductive pursuits and eventually moved in with them. According to Ian, his friends "were a bad influence. . . . They were criminal-minded. They were into organized crime." When probed on the topic of friends, gang involvement and organized crime, Ian was somewhat sullen and suspicious of the line of questioning. He did, however, claim gang involvement, and mentioned that "There were maybe 20 or 30 of us . . . some of them in their twenties." Invited to discuss how and where he obtained his financial resources, Ian answered rather curtly: "Organized crime." He went on to say that his parents gave him money, though "It wasn't enough for [his] lifestyle." He added, "Like for a normal teenager it's enough, but for me it wasn't." In order to be accepted by the gang and profit personally, he compromised his values and began leading a socially deviant lifestyle.

In the end, Ian was asked to execute an act of violence that resulted in a criminal conviction and subsequent incarceration. He acknowledged that his participation in this criminal act resulted from two factors. First, he was selected because of his age, for an adult would face a more severe sentence if convicted. Second, the cash advance of several thousand dollars besides a substantial payoff following the criminal act was "just too tempting." Ian recognised that he had "made a huge mistake" and suggested that he was quite remorseful and sensitive to how his actions affected the victims and their families.

Ian is a first-time Phase Two offender with one prior Phase One conviction. He was serving his first custodial disposition, which resulted when the victims suffered serious injuries. When he was interviewed, Ian mentioned that he maintained regular phone contact with his parents but did not expect any visits. Although Ian reported that he had adjusted well to custody, he mentioned occasionally having problems with other peers: "I only have an anger management problem in here, not on the outside. Living with all these idiots in here gets me mad--these kids are so noisy." He added, "I straighten them out every now and then. I ask them nicely a couple of times to be quiet, and if they don't listen, I give them a couple of shots in the head." Despite his vigilante tactics, Ian's behaviour was described as "generally good." Moreover, he had reached the highest institutional level for privileges and incurred only a few minor behaviourial infractions since his arrival to the Young Offender Unit.

After his release from open custody, Ian planned to return to his mother's home, find part-time employment, complete high school, and then move on to university, where he would like to "study business at the university of [name omitted]." He mentioned that he would like to be employed in the computer industry and "become a businessman someday." Finally, when asked what he had learned about himself since being incarcerated, he said: "I was blind, you know, I couldn't see straight. I have learned that I am too smart for these guys and this lifestyle."

Jack's Story

Jack's parents formed a common-law relationship when they were quite young. At the time of Jack's birth, his mother and father were both in their teens. Jack was born into a volatile relationship checkered by family violence, alcoholism and serious financial difficulties. When Jack was quite young, a parental fight ensued, and his mother was assaulted. Jack went to live with relatives for several months while she recovered from her injuries. At this time, Jack's father left the relationship. "My mom and dad were never married, they broke up when I was like, 6 months old, and I never saw him much until I was older," remarked Jack.

The couple reunited sometime later; however, the relationship was short-lived. A permanent separation occurred when Jack was age 4. From that point onward, Jack's father did not play a paternal role in his life and had only intermittent contact with him. "Me and my dad don't get along very well . . . like my dad doesn't have very much to do with me, I never see him," said Jack. Moreover, Jack only vaguely remembered the constant dissension in the home; however, he did recall his father's controlling and hostile interpersonal behaviour.

After the separation, Jack's mother assumed full parental custody, and the family moved into a government-subsidized housing complex. During this period, they were not well-off financially and lived in relative poverty. When Jack was 6, his mother entered another abusive common-law relationship marked with mutual drug and alcohol abuse.

Jack recalled that he would try to protect his mother when his abusive stepfather was assaulting her: "I don't remember a lot about my real dad, but I do about my stepdad. He use to beat my mom up a lot. He use to punch her, flip her, and kick her." He added: "He used to beat the crap out of my mom all the time, and I had to grow up with this pathetic drunk." When asked how this affected him, he became anxious and a little teary in his response. Reflecting on his formative years, Jack explained:

> I used to scream and cry. I was just a little thing, I was only six or seven. There is not much that I could do. I used to try to jump on him, and then I would get thrown off. I tried to protect my mom, but he was just too big and strong . . . . He would stagger all over the place. Sometimes he would give me the belt . . . . He is just a drunk. He works in [occupation omitted] every day, but soon as he gets home from work, he will start drinking, and on the weekends, he drinks all the time.

The family moved several times, and at one point, they lived in a tent because they could not afford an apartment. During these early years, Jack had little structure and discipline in his life and had problems following rules both at home and at school. He was required to repeat Grade 1 because of behavioural difficulties. Jack's problematic behaviour may have been exacerbated by his transient lifestyle, besides recurrent parental separations. Jack's stepfather was extremely abusive towards him, sometimes physically, but most often, emotionally. His parents had a turbulent and violent common-law relationship from the beginning and separated several times. Despite this unstable union, the couple had children.

Jack stated that he was disruptive in senior elementary school and skipped weekly. Jack's lack of motivation and indifference to school rules and regulations were paramount in his limited academic achievement. When Jack was 14, he decided to change schools and live with his natural father. Jack stressed that the living arrangement was unsuccessful from the start. His father soon became emotionally and physically abusive towards him, and they "got into it several times." After three months, Jack returned home to live with his mother. Despite the lack of emotional support, constant criticism, and physical abuse, Jack still described his natural father positively:

> I like being with my dad. Like sometimes with my dad, we will go fishing or something. It's very rare, but I do like doing that. Or he will come out and we will do stuff like shooting the ball around, playing hockey, or something. Sometimes we would go snowmobiling in the winter time. Mostly he wouldn't show up, so I would end up snowmobiling by myself, but he comes out once in a while. But when I do things with him I like it a lot.

Upon his return home, Jack refused to follow rules, becoming increasingly defiant and hostile towards his teachers and mother. Around this time, he was also expelled from school due to "skipping and disrespect." Further, Jack mentioned that he became embroiled in several disputes with his mother. He noted that he was "kicked out" of his mother's home on several occasions and either stayed with friends or lived on the streets. "Yeah, I got kicked out of my mother's house, you know, but she always let me back after a few days." He went on to say that their confrontations were directly caused by either his academic problems or his mother's choice of company. Jack suggested that he was upset because his mother began dating his stepfather again: "She still sees this guy off and on. She doesn't want my little brother to turn out like me. I never had a father figure all my life, and she wants him to have a father figure." Jack went on to explain that he had several confrontations with his surrogate father:

> I punched him out last Christmas Eve. They were drinking and he wouldn't let my mom come with me on Christmas Eve. I went to pick her up, and we exchanged some name calling, and then I got outside with him. I was drinking and he was drinking, and my mom was intoxicated. My stepfather came flying out the door after me and we started fighting. I got the best of him this time.

Jack is a first-time Phase Two young offender serving his first custodial disposition for several convictions. His only prior history was a summary offence conviction for which he received alternative measures. At the time of interviewing, he was serving several months of secure custody. When talking about his offence, Jack exhibited some remorse for his victim, but was more concerned about the length of his disposition. He trivialized the offence and angrily complained that the sentence was too long "compared to the other kids' sentences." After completing his sentence, Jack suggested that he would return to his mother's home. He also noted that he would return to school and "try to get along better with his [natural] dad." He added:

> Me and my dad are getting along better now, we are going to try and patch things up when I get out of here. I wrote him a long letter and said that I wanted to patch things up with him. [Has your father responded to your letter?] No, but I talked to him on the phone and his tone of voice towards me is a lot nicer now. I guess he is starting to respect me more because I used to lie to him a lot about things. I don't know, if I did something wrong I would be afraid to tell him because I didn't want him to get mad at me. He would flip out and yell at me or whatever, so I would lie to him a lot.

Kyle's Story

According to Kyle, he was the eldest of several children born to a couple whose marriage he described as "normal." His early years were uneventful, with no incidents of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. However, he did note that disciplinary interventions included "spanking and slapping." Kyle recalled being involved in several community organizations and sporting activities and being "a really good athlete." His mother and father both worked full-time, and they were extremely successful in their chosen professions.

At one point, the family prospered, owning property and several vehicles. However, following a failed business venture, the family lost most of its wealth and struggled financially. The financial hardships reportedly resulted in Kyle's parents separating unamicably when he was 12. Kyle recalled that before their separation, the family atmosphere was one of "constant fighting and bickering," which were aggravated by his father's heavy drinking. When asked if he found his parents' separation stressful, he said, "Not really, because they weren't arguing anymore. So, like I mean, when I was with both of them, they were arguing all the time. So when they split up, it was peace and quiet." Shortly after the separation, Kyle went to live with his father in a large city while his sibling preferred to stay with his mother, who resided in a rural area. According to Kyle, he had minimal contact with his mother from that point onward.

When Kyle was 13, his father moved in with his girlfriend, a woman Kyle described both positively and negatively. He said that his surrogate mother was generous and considerate, although she was occasionally critical of his behaviour--"too strict for [his] liking" -- and could "be a bitch at times." Kyle soon started displaying antisocial behavioural problems at home. In school, his behaviour mirrored the deterioration of his family life. He began to lie, steal, abuse alcohol and drugs, show disrespect for authority figures, and disobey curfews. He mentioned that on weekends, he "really didn't have any curfew" and would stay out until the early hours of the morning. Family counselling was sought because of his problematic behaviour; however, this intervention was unsuccessful because Kyle perceived it to be a "waste of time and money." The situation went from bad to worse in a relatively short period. The household became exceedingly hostile, and in addition, Kyle's parents were forced to put locks on the liquor cabinet and their bedroom door because their belongings were being stolen.

Between the ages of 13 and 14, Kyle was consuming alcohol and drugs on a daily basis and had habitual "run-ins" with his parents. He added: "We would get in fights over me skipping class and smelling like dope." By the age of 15, he was diagnosed as having a severe substance-abuse problem. To address this issue, Kyle was placed in a treatment centre for youths, but was forced to withdraw from the program due to suspicions that he was smuggling drugs into the facility. Kyle was then sent to a very expensive residential drug-treatment program for several months. Beyond the initial diagnosis of alcohol and drug addictions, other problems were identified such as poor anger control, dishonesty, and poor academic performance. Kyle received fairly sophisticated counselling, but shortly after returning to his father's house, Kyle reverted to his previous bad habits.

Kyle's many residential moves, as well as his changes in caregivers and guardians, were well documented by testimonies and evidence of past serious behavioural conflicts resulting from his opposition to following rules of any kind. Kyle was unwilling to accept household directives or consequences and reportedly defied his parents' authority in a blatant, antagonistic, and truculent manner. Attempted discipline involved grounding and removal of privileges, which Kyle ignored. When asked directly, "Did you think your father is strict or lenient?", Kyle answered nonchalantly: "Lenient, I guess . . . curfew and stuff like that." The conflict and turmoil in the household reached a level that compelled his father to place Kyle in the care of the local youth services. When asked why he was ousted from his parents' house, he said that "I didn't get along with [my father's] girlfriend anymore. We were fighting all the time, so I kinda got the boot from their house." After his expulsion, Kyle rarely spoke with his father.

Kyle's stay at the group home was short-lived. He was evicted for suspected thefts in the residence and subsequently placed in another home for youths. This placement was checkered with aggressive, verbally abusive, and intimidating behaviour. He was also asked to leave this dwelling because he had forced the younger residents to purchase drugs for him. Several months before his apprehension, Kyle dropped out of school and moved in with friends who were well-known to police. Kyle explained: "My friends smoke a lot of dope, sell it, get into lots of trouble, and pretty much run the school for the dope and stuff." In fact, Kyle maintained that his much older roommate had just recently been arrested for drug trafficking. When asked if [city name omitted] or choice of friends had anything to do with his getting into trouble or dropping out of school, he said: "There is a big difference in cities, you know, a lot more fights and drugs in [city name omitted]. But as far as friends, it's a matter of the crowd you hang out with. I am sure it makes a difference, though."

While living with these highly negative peers, Kyle was heavily into the "rave scene" and doing drugs "all day long," including "mushrooms, speed, acid, pot, crack, and coke." He also mentioned that he consumed alcohol daily. Just before his incarceration, Kyle moved back in with his natural mother, whom he described as "more strict than my dad, but not super strict." Moreover, when asked if he wanted to return to his mother's home, Kyle replied: "My mom lives in this small town called [town name omitted] right, and I didn't really want to move back there and live in [town name omitted], you know, from [city name omitted], but things happen, it was probably for the best."

Kyle was a first-time Phase Two young offender with only one prior Phase One summary offence conviction, for which he received probation and community service work. At the time of the interview, Kyle was serving several months of secure custody followed by probation. With respect to his most recent offences, Kyle expressed no remorse over his behaviour and was not sensitive to the impact of his actions on his victims. Kyle suggested no definite plans for the future, but really wanted to get as many school credits as possible while in custody. Kyle also said that he may return to his mother's home and continue his academic pursuits when released.

Leonard's Story

Leonard's parents were both in their second significant relationship. Leonard's father had no children from his previous union, and his mother had one. The paternal figure from this previous relationship raised the child and prevented Leonard's mother from having any contact. Leonard's natural parents lived together in a common-law union, and together they had several children of their own, Leonard being the oldest. The family lived in a "bedroom community" just outside a large city, and both parents worked full-time in white-collar jobs. Leonard's mother and father were both college-educated and were financially secure.

The family was outwardly normal, but inwardly dysfunctional. According to Leonard, this common-law relationship lasted for "6 years" and then collapsed because his father was abusing his mother, and she was having "affairs." After the separation, Leonard and his siblings lived with their father. Leonard's mother resisted any contact from her ex-husband and withdrew all visitation rights from her children at this juncture. "My mother split when I was just starting elementary school. I never seen her at all after that," said Leonard. Leonard was not interested in discussing how he felt during this difficult time; however, he did say, "It bothered me a bit. . . . I was angry that my mom did this to me and I blamed myself a little and my marks were also affected." He went on to say that although his natural mother never played a maternal role in his early years, he did, however, "see her on a regular basis now." When asked if his mother was strict or lenient, he said, "I don't know her enough to say. I just started seeing her, like two summers ago was the first time I had contact with her in 11 years, so I don't know her well enough to answer that question."

Shortly after the separation, Leonard's father entered another common-law relationship. Leonard adjusted well to his new surrogate mother, and they grew quite close to one another. When asked if there was physical or emotional abuse in this relationship, Leonard said: "Well, both. There was emotional for sure, and physical, but I never seen it." Just before the separation, Leonard's father lost his lucrative job due to downsizing. The family's material possessions and high standard of living soon disappeared, and Leonard's father was compelled to accept a blue-collar minimum wage job, which was augmented by income from part-time employment. Leonard explained: "He is doing okay now because he has two jobs. They don't pay that well but at least he is always doing something."

Leonard's stepmother subsequently chose to end the relationship with her stepchildren. Leonard expressed a degree of resentment and anger because of her actions. Following the collapse of the relationship, the burden of taking care of the house and his younger sibling became Leonard's responsibility. This also did not sit well with him: "After they split, I had to take care of things around the house because my mom was gone and dad was never there, because he was always working and stuff." Leonard added: "I was stuck doing all the work and it really sucked." When asked directly, "Did your father hassle you at home?", Leonard said, "Yeah, he hassles me about friends and school and you know, being honest."

Following the common-law separation, Leonard and his siblings lived in relative poverty because his father was unable to earn enough money to support the household. They did without basic services and moved several times without paying the bills. Leonard suffered much turbulence in his life at this time and endured many household moves. Leonard had been evicted from his father's home several times, and noted his father's bad temper. Leonard denied physical abuse, but recalled several episodes of verbal and emotional mistreatment. Conversely, he also said that his father was "pretty caring at times." When questioned on the topic of verbal abuse, Leonard responded with a hushed voice filled with anguish: "Oh yeah, there was lots of verbal abuse and there still is." He remarked that when he stayed out past curfew, his father was verbally abusive. Leonard explained their encounters in this way:

> I had a curfew but didn't follow it to best of my ability. But I did have one. On school nights it varied depending on my dad's mood, but it was usually around 10 o'clock. On the weekends it was around 12 o'clock. . . . When I came in late, my dad would scream and yell at me . . .we would have a big argument, so after a while I just didn't show up. It was because of him. He said, 'If you don't come back at the right time, stay out.' So I did.

Around the age of 16, Leonard became embroiled in an argument with his father and was "kicked out to the street." Since then, Leonard had been leading a rather transient lifestyle, living initially at a shelter, then with friends, later on the streets, and eventually in custody. On the topic of friends, Leonard noted that "They're destructive." He added: "They were a bad influence on me." Leonard said that he was supported by crime, welfare, and part-time employment after being "kicked out" of his father's house. "Before I came in here, I was doing [job name omitted]. I also had some other part-time jobs but they also screwed me," he noted. Living independently proved unsuccessful for Leonard; consequently, he returned home just before his most recent incarceration.

Leonard reported that his young offender record dated from age 13 and that his offences had become increasingly more serious over the years. At the time of the interview, Leonard was serving several months in secure custody for one indictable offence conviction. Leonard was uncertain of his accommodation plans upon release from custody, as he had not spoken with his father since being incarcerated. When asked directly, "Do you view your parents as loving and actively involved in your life?", Leonard said: "Except for my mom. Well, she is now, yeah they both are now. But my mom is kinda a friend now, she is there for me." Moreover, Leonard was quite certain he would return to an academic environment: "My future plans include finishing my Grade 12 for sure, maybe living on my own, and having a part-time job." He also mentioned that his long-range plans included enrolling in community college and pursuing a career in the restaurant industry: "I plan on going to college and studying food preparation. I plan on becoming a chef and then open my own business up someday."

Summary

This chapter presented its findings in relation to specific research question 2: What family background factors, if any, contributed to the participants' dropping out of high school? To answer this question, several data-gathering techniques were employed. This chapter sought to examine childhood, personality, and environmental factors related to early school leaving. The chapter included a life-history perspective and produced a comprehensive individual picture for each participant.

Several themes surfaced from the individual life-history perspectives. Approximately two-thirds of the participants in the present study had been exposed to some type of child abuse. Nine participants witnessed abuse, 6 participants were exposed to physical abuse, 1 participant was exposed to sexual abuse, 7 participants experienced emotional abuse, while 4 participants were neglected. The participants had an average of 10 household moves, some participants experiencing five residential moves in one year. Furthermore, all participants attended at least two different detention facilities, the average being 6.3. Exactly two-thirds of the participants reported a history of family-crisis intervention, and just over half identified episodic periods of transiency and homelessness. Finally, 7 participants reported living independently before age 16.

A large proportion of the participants had experienced several negative family influences. Slightly more than half had been rejected by a parent or guardian, and 10 participants had experienced some type of family conflict before incarceration. Eleven of the 12 participants came from families where "marital" discord was pervasive either previously or presently. Except for 2 participants, all had experienced both inadequate parental supervision and inconsistent parental discipline. An important concluding research finding indicated that 6 participants came from families where parental substance abuse was pervasive.

In the context of neighbourhood and community characteristics, the findings showed that the average annual household income of the participants' neighbourhoods ranged from $21,000 to $66,000. Participants were asked if firearms or drugs were easily attainable in their neighbourhoods. Incredibly, all 12 participants reported easy availability of both. Further, three-quarters of the participants came from neighbourhoods that either the media, correctional personnel, or the participants themselves characterized as "violent." A final important research finding indicated that 8 participants came from neighbourhoods where known gang activity was reported or perceived to be widespread.

In the context of individual characteristics, 3 of the 12 participants had experienced a traumatic life event. The data show that 2 of these 3 participants also had comorbid depressive and antisocial disorders besides substance- abuse problems. Two participants had been diagnosed with clinical depression, and 2 reported that they were extremely homesick. Only 2 participants had documented suicidal histories. Additionally, two-thirds of the participants had experienced early behaviour problems. Eleven participants manifested rebellious behaviour. Five-sixths of the participants reported having problems controlling their tempers, especially in confrontational situations. Finally, two-thirds contended that they had abused drugs or alcohol. Furthermore, all 12 participants reported some experimentation with or occasional use of both alcohol and illicit drugs.

Overall, most participants in the present study associated with companions who appeared to be a negative influence. This factor is important because researchers have conclusively demonstrated that peer pressure strongly affects individual behaviour. All 12 participants reported having companions with criminal records, the range being from "some" friends to "90%." Further, one-third of the participants associated with companions at least four years beyond their age range, and one-half of the participants had companions involved in organized crime and/or gang activity. Participants were asked if they were easily influenced by friends, and all 12 reported, "Yes." In addition, 11 participants had friends who had dropped out of school. An important concluding research finding was that 11 of the 12 participants reported at least some substance abuse among their companions.

CHAPTER 6

AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter examines the educational background of the participants and is guided by specific research question 3: What school-related factors, if any, contributed to these young offenders dropping out of high school? The chapter is organized into two sections and draws together data from several sources. The first section uses a narrative format to describe the participants' educational background. The stories were compiled from institutional and school files and interviews with the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

The Participants' Stories

Andrew's Story

Andrew had lived in one province from kindergarten to Grade 5, and in another from Grades 6 to 8, and reported attending a total of approximately 10 different elementary schools. He recalled a total of 12 elementary school suspensions and stated that his problems at school began when he was relatively young. Although Andrew experienced no major difficulties in kindergarten or Grade 1, he had trouble sitting for any extended period in the classroom. When Andrew was about 7, he was diagnosed as having an Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and placed on Ritalin. Andrew explained:

> Oh yeah, they said I had ADD and a Learning Deficit Disorder. This ADD is the diagnosis that everybody gets these days, just because there is nothing else they can say. . . . There is another one, but I forgot what it is. I have had over 30 or 40 psychological evaluations. I refuse to do them now. I went to [hospital name omitted] and [hospital name omitted], and all them big places and some of them said, "There is nothing wrong with the boy, he is just off track." Other doctors said: "He has ADD." I don't know, it's different every time I go.

By the time he was 8, Andrew was exhibiting temper tantrums in school, becoming uncontrollable at times, and routinely spending his days in the principal's office. Andrew said: "From kindergarten to Grade 6, I didn't skip a lot, but I did spend next to every day in the office." When asked in an open-ended manner to discuss his early grade-school experiences, he responded rather curtly: "I did the work and stuff, but I got into lots of fights." When probed on the topic of fighting, Andrew glared at the ceiling and said, "I didn't like other kids and stuff, I had lots of friends and stuff. It's just that there were certain kids I didn't get along with." Following the family's relocation to a large metropolitan area, Andrew's school performance deteriorated, and by Grade 7, a distinct pattern emerged. Andrew began having attendance problems and started skipping class regularly. He had inconsistent work habits, generally put forth little effort, and had disruptive episodes: "Like one time I threw a chair at the teacher, another time I threw a desk, just throwing furniture and stuff." Andrew said that he "got into a lot of fights and trouble" at elementary school, but pointed out that he "never hit a teacher." Andrew went on to explain that he had only verbal confrontations with teachers:

> I would try to talk to my teachers, you know, but it always ended up in me mouthing off. I would get mad and say "Fuck you" and leave, you know, but I wouldn't go and punch them or push them. There would just be arguing and stuff, no physical abuse towards my teachers.

In senior elementary school, Andrew's work habits were unsatisfactory, and he either failed or did not meet teacher expectations in several courses. His failures apparently resulted in a special education placement. Despite this new programming, Andrew continued to experience difficulties in school. "There were low grades because I wasn't there much because I was always getting into fights and stuff" observed Andrew. Although Andrew's work habits and attendance patterns were inconsistent and irregular, he did pass Grade 8. Moreover, he was a capable athlete with above average marks in physical and health education. Predictably, he said that one of his favourite subjects was "PE." When Andrew was 14, the local youth services became involved with his family. His mother sought this intervention due to the difficulties he was presenting both in social and personal contexts. At school, he was not living up to his parents' expectations, particularly in matters of school attendance. At home, he generally resisted his parents' rules. Andrew was associating with companions of questionable character and staying out all weekend without reporting his whereabouts.

Andrew was soon placed in a foster home where he remained for several months. Although he continued to cause problems at school, he attended reluctantly but regularly. Following this foster placement, Andrew returned to his parents' home for a short time; however, he was soon placed in a treatment facility where professionals attempted to address school-attendance problems and other problematic behaviour. When asked directly if he had ever talked to the school psychologist, he replied:

> I think so. They were always at meetings with my family and stuff, but I never went. Well, I went once. It was total bullshit, the regular stuff: "Your son has to go to school Mrs. [name omitted], or we're going to throw him out." My mom's like, "Well, what can I do? I can't make him go to school if he doesn't want to."

Following his treatment, he returned to his parents' home, but soon left to live in a youth hostel. This venture was short-lived, and Andrew returned to his parents' home after a few months, then moved out to live on his own again. These short-term living arrangements only exacerbated his already checkered school attendance history.

The lack of effort, disruptive behaviour, and environmental instability that had impeded his success in elementary school continued into his high school years and were characterized by increased criminal activity and the usual skipping of classes: "The vice-principal caught me skipping one day in the hallway and talked to me about it. I was skipping so much back then." Andrew added: "Mr. [principal's name omitted] told me that if I didn't smarten up my act, they were going to throw me out of high school." In addition, his escalating misbehaviour forced him to withdraw from scholastic events: "After a while I was just there to do what I had to do and leave. . . . I just didn't like the whole school environment." In several classes, his disruptive behaviour, lack of effort and tardiness mirrored those of his elementary school years in most respects; consequently, he was asked to leave school several times. During the interview, Andrew's comments left no doubt about his problematic school behaviour:

> When I did show up for school, I was always late. It's not like I wouldn't go to school--I would go to first period, then I would take off second period and go and chill with my friends. Usually take a double lunch and then I would come back for third and fourth period. I always made it to school every day, but sometimes I didn't go in.

When asked directly, "How often were you suspended from high school?", Andrew answered rather hurriedly: "Fifteen or sixteen times." These suspensions, in combination with other problems, resulted in Andrew dropping out of secondary school: "I don't know for sure if I actually left or if they kicked me out of high school. I think it was a little bit of both." He continued, "The VP told me if I skipped one more class, he was going to kick me out. I skipped five classes, went back for one, then never went back again." Reflecting on the past, Andrew described his last two school years:

> I went to Grade 9 the full year, but I didn't pass. Then they put me in Grade 9 and 10 the next year. After I went half the year, I quit, started skipping off and on--you know, I still went now and then. I would say I probably went three days a week or so.

Andrew was somewhat uninterested in discussing the circumstances relating to his last few days in school; however, he commented: "They kicked me out and everything, but I can't say it's their fault, cause I put myself in that situation and got myself kicked out. I can't blame nobody but myself." Apparently Andrew had no high-school credits; however, he claimed to have obtained credits while in custody. He explained: "They say I have no credits from anywhere, but I know I do." When interviewed, Andrew was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility, taking four Grade 10 courses: two at the basic and two at the general level. Commenting on his academic ability, Andrew noted, "I'm not book smart I'm street smart. I will always survive. You can be book smart and not make it." He concluded: "I will always make it because I know what is going on." Andrew did not particularly like the academic environment; regardless, he wanted to finish high school "at an alternative school" in order to join the Canadian Armed Forces. He added, "I don't like school too much, but know I have to go to get things in life."

Brent's Story

Brent experienced school problems from an early age. He had temper tantrums and demonstrated overt aggressive and threatening behaviour towards others: Brent recalled that "In kindergarten, I think I hit a teacher with an orange once." On another occasion, Brent noted that he "threw a desk or something at the teacher." He was also extremely argumentative and had no reservations in disrupting the class. "In my early school years, I was the class clown, always horsing around and throwing stuff at other students . . . I just like acting up in class." From Grades 1 to 3, Brent displayed habitual destructiveness in the classroom and had little or no respect for teachers. Predictably, Brent said, "The teachers at high school are way better."

When Brent was approximately 8 years old, his natural parents separated and the children remained in the maternal home. Brent soon began to exhibit increasing behavioural problems both at home and at school. In fact, during this period, Brent received his first out-of-school suspension for fighting. Brent maintained his aggressive personality had something to do with his emotionally turbulent family life, particularly the separation of his parents. In senior elementary school, Brent was suspended several times for fighting, fooling around, and distracting other students. Brent attributed such problematic behaviour to his failing Grade 4 and being permanently expelled from several schools. He explained: "I got kicked out of three different elementary schools. All of them for fighting and not going to school and stuff." He finished: "I probably had around 20-plus [elementary] school suspensions." His behaviour became so troublesome that he was assigned a social worker to deal with his school and family problems. From ages 8 to

10, Brent became involved with a local social service agency. In view of Brent's problematic behaviour, his mother requested that he be placed in a group home, as she could not cope with the problems he was causing. This placement lasted several months. Upon returning home, Brent continued to be aggressive and hostile around family members. Feeling unable to cope again, his mother placed Brent in the care of his father, who resided in another province. Contact with his mother ended at this time but resumed several years later. Brent explained: "I get along with my mom now. We were apart for five years but it's fine now."

Shortly after Brent moved, his problematic behaviour began surfacing at school. Again, he had no reservations about involving himself in physical or verbal confrontations with teachers or fellow students and did little homework. "I read my transcript just now and they said that I never brought any homework home . . . My handwriting was bad and I was disruptive." Brent's disruptive behaviour resulted in a special education placement for at-risk and disruptive youth. When asked to provide details about his special education placement, Brent appeared agitated by the question: "I have no learning disabilities. They say I have a short memory, though. One of my transcripts says that I was very disruptive and a behaviour problem, but not stupid." When asked directly, "How were your marks generally in elementary school?", Brent answered succinctly: "They were average."

The defiance, property destruction, verbal abuse and violence evident during Brent's elementary school years continued at high school, with increasing incidents of criminal acts: "I got caught once for stealing cars, but I won that case, but the rest of them, mischief under, theft under, possession over, I lost. I was arrested [between 30 and 50] times in three and a half years." He continued: "My first time was a big fine, [dollar amount omitted] bucks, my second time was [number of months omitted] months probation, third was [number of months omitted] months probation and the fourth one was [number of months omitted] months of open custody with [number of months omitted] months of probation and my fifth one was [number of months omitted] months of closed custody." Brent recalled a similar pattern in school to that noted directly above: "In high school, I was mostly skipping, getting detentions, and fighting all the time." He added: "I have no idea why I fought so much, I just did." Brent recalled being suspended "twenty or so times" besides receiving countless detentions. When asked to further discuss his problematic behaviour at school, Brent responded candidly:

> I was reading my school file over the other day, and one report said I brought a knife to school. Another one said that I stabbed a kid in the hand with a piece of glass. Another said I brought a pellet gun to school. I did a lot of dumb things, fighting, skipping, and not listening to teachers. I wouldn't attend detentions, or if a teacher said, "Go to the office," I would say, "Okay," then go to my locker, grab my jacket, and walk home.

While attending high school, Brent did very little homework. He explained: "I never brought anything home. Homework was something I didn't have time for--I was doing other things, I wasn't home much." When asked directly why he was not home much, Brent replied: "Actually I worked full-time . . . forty hours on one job and part-time on the others." Brent went on to describe an extensive assortment of work experiences, pointing out that besides his full-time work, he was also employed part-time at a department store. He also asserted that he worked part-time as a labourer with his father. When probed further on the topic of employment, Brent shook his head up and down several times as he commented: "Yes, it was tough, I was going to school from morning to noon and then working from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until 1 o'clock in the morning. He concluded: "It was a tough job, I was working at a plant called [name omitted], but it was good money."

Brent said that he attended four different secondary schools and "got kicked out of all of them for fighting and not going and stuff." Ironically, Brent admitted he missed the high school environment. Further, he remarked that he had tried to return several times but was denied admission at every attempt: "I didn't want to leave school, I got kicked out for fighting and stuff. When asked directly, "Was there a major incident which got you kicked out of school?" Brent stated: "I pulled a knife on a kid, that ticked them off." Brent continued: "I tried to go back many times, but the VP just said, 'Get out of my school, we don't want you back.'" He went on to say that he tried to get admitted to other high schools within the same district but was also denied admission:

> I tried many times, but the schools just wouldn't accept me when they saw my transcripts. Some accepted me, but once they saw my transcripts they said, "No way, get out. . . ." Finally, the whole board said, "Just get out." They just said that "[Brent] is not allowed back in our schools." They sent a letter home to my parents, saying, "Get out, we don't want him here. Your son is being removed from [school name omitted] and we don't want him back, period."

When asked directly, "How often would you skip class?" Brent answered rather eloquently: "At the beginning of the year, in Grade 9, I didn't really skip and near the end, I never really went." According to Brent, he was "bored in school" and always "fooled around," but recalled getting "A's and B's." Brent added: "I was in the general but was told to do advanced, but I never did it." Despite his problematic behaviour, he did, however, manage to get all his Grade 9 credits. "I didn't really have any marks, I didn't finish high school. I did Grade 9 and that was it."

Once expelled from high school, Brent continued to work and enrolled in an alternative education program. He acquired a few credits; however, he was forced to withdraw due to a term of secure custody. Upon incarceration, he enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking four Grade 10 courses at the general level. Brent reported that when released, he would probably move back with his father and stepmother and might continue his education: "I plan to finish high school and then go to college some day. What I am trying to do here is finish my Grade 10 in a matter of two months and get good marks." He added: "Then I can ask to get into the advanced program once I get into the adult high school." Finally, invited to discuss his attitude towards school, Brent answered without hesitation:

> Before I didn't have a good attitude towards school, but now I do. I just matured so much in the last year and realize that I have to go to college. I plan on going for architecture, but if I can't do that, I'll take computer programming instead. . . . I may also go to university, but I'll see how I do at college first. I'm not going to spend 25 grand on university if I can't do it.

Calvin's Story

Calvin attended 10 elementary schools from kindergarten to Grade 8, experiencing academic difficulties in addition to attendance and behaviour problems. Further, Calvin reported a total of four elementary-school suspensions besides failing Grade 5: "Yeah, I failed Grade 5. I was going to pass the year, but my mom didn't feel it was the right decision." Calvin continued: "They were going to pass me because of my age, but my mom decided, 'No, it's not happening, hold him back for a year.' It was my mom that made the decision." On the positive side, Calvin was friendly, outgoing, and an exceptional athlete. Despite his problematic behaviour, frequent household moves, and Grade 5 failure, Calvin progressed through elementary school with passing marks. When asked directly, "What kind of student were you in elementary school?" Calvin stated:

> I was happy-go-lucky most of the time and my marks were okay. In kindergarten, when it came to the social skills and stuff like that, I excelled in those areas. When it came to some of the academics, I was just an average student.

However, beneath this "happy-go-lucky" exterior was a troubled child whose home life and developmental history were less than ideal. Calvin's background was replete with many family and personal problems, including an unrewarding relationship with his parents, familial substance abuse, the death of a sibling, recurrent parental separations, and a somewhat transient lifestyle.

According to Calvin, he started getting into trouble in junior high school: "When I reached junior high school, I started fighting and skipping school. Grade 6, 7 and 8, that is when it really started to happen." He explained the sequence of events:

> In Grade 6, I started getting an attitude and started having confrontations with some of the teachers. I was just testing to see what I could get away with. Then in Grade 7 and 8, I started getting in trouble from outside of the school, like robbing and stealing from stores and stuff like that.

Before that, Calvin had a history of participation in sports, especially in the school milieu: "I used to be really involved in school sports, you might say I had a future in sports. Football and basketball were my sports of choice, and I had a lot of scouts coming to watch me play basketball." Calvin concluded: "Once I reached high school, there were too many distractions. Obstacles came up, you know--you start hanging out with the wrong people and start making money and doing crime instead of school things."

Serious problems surfaced with Calvin when he began high school. His high-school career was characterized by truancy, gang associations, fighting, suspensions, academic difficulties, probation, incarceration and frequent school moves. According to Calvin, he attended no less than six high schools during a period spanning two years. When asked why, he replied, "I just got kicked out of a lot of schools, you know." Documentation noted that Calvin had behavioural and academic difficulties. He received many warnings and reprimands for "disrupting class" and for using "profane language." He was subsequently suspended for many other school violations. For example, one report mentioned he was suspended for "conduct injurious to the mental and physical well-being of others in the school," while other reports documented suspensions for "skipping class" and "roughhousing."

When asked to reflect on his dealings with school staff, Calvin expressed hostility towards the vice-principal: "I hated the vice-principal, I swear I was going to kill that guy, you know! Rumour had it that he was an ex-cop, you know." He finished: "He was a real asshole most of the time. Every little thing I did he would call the cops on me, and everyone in the high school would see me leaving in handcuffs." When probed on the topic of the vice-principal, Calvin said with a scowl: "All my friends thought he was a real prick too because they had the same story as me. The other kids in the school thought he was the one keeping our school safe, so he was all right for them." In contrast, Calvin saw his teachers more favourably: "I got along with the majority of my teachers, most of them were good. There were always some that would try to break me down, you know, there was always a power struggle with these guys." He concluded: "I guess they like to target someone, maybe they like the challenge of teaching someone like me."

Soon after the second semester began, Calvin was transferred to another high school. Calvin approved of the administrative transfer since he could make a fresh start and avoid gang members and other negative acquaintances. However, his new school residency was short-lived. Calvin became involved with the youth justice system and received a secure-custody sentence of several months. The following September, Calvin enrolled in another high school within the same board, but was promptly expelled due to truancy, fighting, and violence. Calvin's work habits were inconsistent, and he did not meet course expectations in most of his subjects. Calvin explained: "I just got kicked out. Well, that is not exactly true, I got kicked out for robbing someone in school." Calvin was subsequently admitted to a fourth high school where he acquired eight Grade 9 credits. "You have completed your Grade 9 experience and have been granted eight (8) equivalent credits. You may now proceed to Grade 10," noted one report. However, Calvin was not allowed to return the following September as school officials expressed concerns regarding Calvin's difficulty with rules and structure. Further, his involvement with the youth justice system resulted in extended absences from school. These short-term custodial dispositions appear to have only worsened Calvin's already poor rapport with school officials.

Returning to his first high school, Calvin enrolled again, was accepted, and did quite well for the first few months. School reports affirmed that initially, he had "excellent marks" ; however, Calvin soon reverted to his past *modus operandi*. He realized that the rules had not changed, and his behaviour and comportment soon deteriorated. Calvin admitted to a lack of concentration, being suspended for either fighting, inappropriate behaviour or truancy, and having a negative attitude towards school in general: "I had a negative attitude for sure. Too many things were going on in my life. Dealing with courts, dealing with teachers, and dealing with stuff at home." Additionally, Calvin noted his alienation in the high school environment:

> I felt alienated at school, you know. The good kids would go home, and their parents would say, "Don't hang around that kid [Calvin], he is a bad influence and trouble maker." Like once, this girl skipped class with me. My math teacher called her father and told him, "This kid steals cars, stays outside the school in the parking lot, robs people, and has been in jail several times, so I think it would be a good idea if your daughter didn't hang around with him at all." How did this teacher know about my young offender charges? Anyway, he shouldn't have said anything to this parent. I don't know how he found out, but he must have found out from the vice-principal.

Calvin's attitude towards authority figures, especially school staff, was extremely confrontational. He mentioned, "A couple of times in high school, I got into a couple of physical conflicts, like throwing a desk at a teacher, but I never touched a teacher." Reports also documented chronic absenteeism besides the confrontational behaviour: Calvin had been absent over 40 times from his business class, over 30 times from his history class, and over 25 times from his science class during the semester. Because of behavioural and attendance problems, Calvin was forced to withdraw from school. When asked what his parents thought of him leaving school early, Calvin responded in a hushed voice filled with distress: "My mom was hurt, you know. My father always jumped on me for school because he didn't have an education. They both tried, you know."

At the time of his arrest, Calvin had earned roughly 10 credits from high school and he now wanted to continue his academic studies once released from custody; however, he was uncertain if the school board would allow him to return. Calvin was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking two Grade 10 courses and two Grade 11 courses at the general level. Finally, when asked what advice he would offer his friends if they were considering dropping out of school, Calvin said:

> I would tell them don't do it no matter how much bullshit you have to put up with. Find something to vent your anger and your stress, find somebody to talk to. Talk to your girlfriend, even your sister, your siblings, someone, just talk to them first.

Daniel's Story

Daniel was raised in an unstable home marked by family violence, marital discord, poverty, and alcoholism. He attended three elementary schools from kindergarten to Grade 6, and had a long history of disruptive behaviour, both in the community and in the academic environment. However, Daniel reported a total of only one elementary-school suspension. According to Daniel, school problems did not really begin to surface until Grade 4: "Up until Grade 4, I did okay in school. I really didn't have any major problems in school. Then I started getting bad marks, and by Grade 7 I was skipping all the time." Coincidentally, Grade 4 was the time when Daniel's parents separated. After suffering years of emotional and physical abuse from her common-law spouse, Daniel's mother left the relationship, taking the children with her. At this time, Daniel had other emotional issues to deal with, such as the deaths of a grandparent and another close relative. According to Daniel, he started developing behavioural problems, and his negative behaviour became progressively worse at school. Following the common-law separation, the family moved several times before settling in a community just outside a large metropolitan area.

Daniel and his siblings lived in relative poverty because their mother was unable to earn enough money to support the household. Apparently, Daniel's mother was a chronic abuser of alcohol, relying heavily on welfare and other government subsidies. Further, he mentioned that several of his mother's subsequent partners also had difficulties with alcohol. As indicated in the previous chapter, Daniel's family had a long history of alcoholism, and Daniel continued the tradition. Daniel said that he routinely drank beer and liquor on school property and would occasionally go to class "feeling a little buzzed." On the topic of alcohol, Daniel noted a link between school failure and his alcohol consumption. In fact, Daniel described himself as nothing but a "dropout who was a thief and a drunk."

As an adolescent, Daniel had little guidance, structure, or support from his parents and was, in fact, given the freedom to make most of his own decisions in life. When asked directly, "How late could you stay out on school nights?" Daniel answered succinctly: "I came in whenever I felt like it, I never had a curfew." He went on to say that "Well, all the crimes I do are at night time, so yeah, staying out late that was a big factor." His father, maternal uncle, and natural brother all had extensive criminal records and had a generally negative influence on Daniel. Daniel's school-related difficulties were probably more closely tied to a lack of parental support and family deficits rather than to cognitive deficiencies. Although Daniel apparently failed Grades 7 and 8, he did not perceive himself as having difficulty academically; nevertheless, he did acknowledge serious behaviour problems at school. Asked if he felt isolated at school, he said: "Sometimes I feel out of place. You know, a bunch of little kids in the classroom."

Daniel noted that his history of school truancy and suspensions "really started around Grade 6." He added: "In Grade 6 and 7, I really started skipping a lot and would only show up every now and then." Around this time, Daniel became involved with a local youth service agency due to his negative behaviour in a wide range of personal and social contexts. Daniel's problematic behaviour persisted, and again, his mother sought the intervention of another youth-service agency. This time, Daniel was referred to a substance abuse facility; however, he routinely missed appointments, citing previous commitments. At the beginning of Grade 9, Daniel was a source of much concern for teachers and administrators as he was continuously "mouthing off to teachers" and had little respect for authority figures. Daniel added: "I was also skipping a lot and stuff, and my behaviour was real bad too." Shortly after beginning Grade 9, Daniel was referred to what he termed a "behaviour school." He argued: "It sure wasn't my decision to go to the behaviour school, it was the vice-principal's decision." Apparently, Daniel did quite well in the structured environment of this school for emotionally disturbed and behaviourally difficult children. Nevertheless, he still did the bare minimum required to get by academically. When asked if he obtained any credits at this school, Daniel replied sarcastically: "I had to go to this damn behaviour school, but I got all of them [academic credits] there." When probed further on the topic of the "behaviour school," Daniel was somewhat more positive: "The school was all right, the place was pretty good, I guess. I didn't really learn that much there, but at least I got most of my Grade 9 credits."

Identified as an at-risk and special education student, Daniel returned to the regular high school environment and managed to get the remainder of his Grade 9 credits. However, his minimal academic achievement was reflected in his marks. Daniel found high school frustrating, boring, and too regimented. He recalled: "Some of the classes were so long, it makes it pretty boring." Daniel noted that his Grade 10 high school "marks were pretty bad, between 40% and 60%" and that he obtained only a few credits. When asked to explain what his parents said about these low grades, Daniel responded rather expressionlessly: "Not much. . . . They just said, 'You better do better next year.'" He added: "My dad was a little concerned, but he didn't have no say, because I didn't live with him." Further, Daniel had a poor attendance record, rarely did homework, and generally had a bad attitude. As Daniel explained "I was just a little prick and mouthed off to teachers all the time and never showed up for classes." He added: "I got a lot of detentions back then and got suspended by the vice-principal a lot"

According to Daniel, he attended two different high schools, dropping out of one school and being "kicked out" of the other. He noted being suspended "quite a few times" for skipping and other problematic behaviour. When queried about the number of times he had been suspended from high school, Daniel said: "I don't know, about 10 times or so, I guess." He added: "When I skipped school, I got detentions but never went, so then I would get suspended for doing that." Daniel associated with delinquent companions who pressured him into skipping school. He explained: "The friends I was hanging around with gave me the wrong example, you know. I had no one at home, so I would hang around a bunch of real idiots." He concluded: "If I didn't skip school with them, they would call me a geek and stuff."

After the first semester of Grade 10, Daniel was not allowed to return to high school because of his low grades and poor attitude towards school staff. Daniel explained that he did not like the high school environment in any case and in particular did not appreciate the vice-principal telling him what he "could and could not do all the time." Daniel added: "I wouldn't listen to the vice-principal. I would just get sarcastic and stuff. I would get lippy and end up getting suspended." When asked to further reflect on his dealings with the vice-principal, Daniel explained that "He treats you like you treat him. When you're an idiot, he will treat you like an idiot. . . . I sure didn't respect him at the time, but now that I think about it, I guess I do."

At the time of his arrest, Daniel had earned approximately 11.0 credits towards his secondary school diploma. Within one week of his incarceration, he was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking three Grade 10 courses and one Grade 11 course at the general and basic levels, respectively. After several months in the educational program, Daniel had made very little progress, earning a total of only 0.5 credits in his four courses. Daniel's behaviour at the young offender school was marginal at best. In several classes, he exhibited many of the same behavioural traits that plagued him at high school. Apparently Daniel had accumulated more than five in-school negative behaviour reports for such things as inappropriate language, refusing to do the required assignments and continuous disruptive behaviour. In fact, when interviewed, Daniel had just returned to school following a three-day suspension for not doing his homework and refusing to do academic work in the classroom.

Once released from custody, Daniel hoped to continue his academic studies and obtain his Grade 12 diploma. However, Daniel had several outstanding criminal charges and was therefore uncertain as to the exact date he would be able to return to school. Daniel noted that he would eventually like to move on to college; however, other than this desire, he had no long-term educational or vocational goals. Finally, when asked what advice he would offer his friends if they were considering dropping out of school, Daniel responded: "I would tell them, don't be stupid, and stay in school. School keeps you out of trouble and jail, I guess, and eventually gets you a good job."

Ethan's Story

Ethan attended three different elementary schools from kindergarten to Grade 8 and had experienced academic success in his early primary school years. However, in senior elementary school, Ethan did not attain good grades, was less cooperative, and school records documented hyperactivity, depression, and lack of motivation as three areas of concern. When asked directly, "What did your mother say about your low grades in elementary school?" Ethan shrugged his shoulders and seemed perplexed by the question: "What could she say? She didn't like it, but there was nothing she could do about it." Ethan suggested he "was just an average student in elementary school," and school documentation appeared to substantiate this assertion. However, deficits were noted in the area of motivation: "While very capable [Ethan] has not been consistent in his over-all effort this year and has lacked motivation." Although his school performance was poor by Grade 5, Ethan did comment that he had liked the school environment, particularly his elementary school teachers. When the subject of teachers came up, Ethan replied:

> I like someone who actually understands or tries to understand what is going on in my life. Doesn't try to treat all the kids as one, because they aren't, everyone is different. A teacher that can actually look at every different person and see what they need is good.

When asked if he got along with his elementary school teachers, Ethan nodded his head up and down: "Yeah, they were good. I liked school a lot back then. I liked everything about school at that point in time. I was involved in sports, I had a good time."

When Ethan was in Grade 6, his adoptive mother separated from her second husband. The marriage was short-lived; however, Ethan had bonded with his surrogate father. After the marital separation, the family moved into a smaller house that happened to be near Ethan's maternal grandparents. Ethan thoroughly enjoyed his grandfather's company and visited him daily. Several months after their new-found friendship, Ethan's grandfather died suddenly. Following the unexpected passing of his grandfather, Ethan began to display signs of depression and problematic behaviour in school. According to Ethan, he still did "pretty well" in school until Grade 8 when drug and alcohol use began to affect his life. Asked if he ever abused drugs or alcohol at elementary school, he said, "Yup, I was around 11 or 12 years old when I first started." When asked about substance abuse, Ethan commented: "My drug of choice in elementary school was alcohol and pot, that's all." Further, Ethan reported that by the end of Grade 8, he had received a total of 10 elementary school suspensions, several of which were related to substance abuse.

The factors that had impeded Ethan's success in elementary school carried over to high school, with increasing incidents of skipping, truancy, and substance abuse. Ethan said he experimented with "alcohol and pot" when he was "11 or 12 years old" and then started abusing the "harder drugs by age 14." He described his drug of choice in high school as "anything he could get his hands on." Further, he noted that he "was stoned every school day." According to Ethan, he became a regular user of heroin, crack cocaine, uppers, downers, and acid. Although Ethan apparently stopped using heavier drugs in Grade 10, he continued to use marijuana regularly and would "attend class stoned all the time." Asked how he behaved in the classroom when "stoned," Ethan replied: "When I was in class I was usually really high, so I sat there and stared at everyone." Aware that drugs and alcohol affected his school performance, Ethan expressed a desire to make changes in the future.

Ethan was never a strong student academically, and his school performance began to worsen by age 13. At the beginning of Grade 9, Ethan had a fight with his mother. In a fit of anger, he moved from his mother's home against her wishes and moved in with peers who were well-known to police. From that point onward, Ethan had an irregular school attendance pattern. Ethan explained: "I usually went to school every day. I got on the bus and got off the bus and did whatever I wanted." Ethan concluded: "I would go to my first class and get my attendance, then I would go to the washroom and leave." A review of Ethan's Grade 9 report cards confirmed his irregular attendance pattern. Ethan had over 70 absences from his geography class, over 40 from his English class, and over 30 from his physical education class, but in contrast, under 10 absences from his technology class. Not surprisingly, Ethan reported that his favourite subjects in high school were the "technical courses and drama."

By his middle teens, Ethan had endured a great deal of turbulence and turmoil in his life. Besides being rejected by his natural mother, Ethan had experienced the traumatic loss of three parental figures, two of them through death. Further, Ethan's low level of academic achievement may have been exacerbated by disruptions at home, his transient lifestyle, alcohol and drug abuse, and psychological problems such as depression. Also at this time, both Ethan and his sibling became involved with the youth justice system. Ethan was, in fact, placed on probation for several thefts, and his sibling receiving an open-custody disposition for his crimes.

When asked, "Did you have a positive or negative attitude towards school?" Ethan answered forcefully: "I didn't like it, I hated it." Despite his dislike for the academic environment, he did, however, manage to get all his Grade 9 credits. "They just gave me the credits in Grade 9," Ethan declared. Ethan found school "boring and a waste of his time" because he "could finish all the work in 20 minutes"; consequently, he started skipping "at least three times a day" and associating with highly negative peers who were "always getting into trouble from the vice-principal and never working." Ethan also acknowledged that he did not have a particularly good rapport with the vice-principal and would "visit him" weekly: "He asked me why I was in his office again, why was I still bothering to come to school at all." When probed further on the topic of the vice-principal, Ethan said, "I didn't like the VP. He kept getting me into trouble. He yelled at me and shit, giving me detentions and stuff, but I never went."

According to Ethan, he attended four high schools and was suspended "around 10-plus times, if not more," primarily for "fighting and skipping." He also remarked that

"We used to do a lot of crazy shit in high school," but was reluctant to elaborate any further. According to Ethan, he felt rejected by the educational system. In spite of this feeling, he noted, "It was all my fault. I brought this on myself, you know." Problematic behaviour, psychological problems, low grades, and negative peer pressure continued into Grade 10, resulting in Ethan's early school departure: "My friends also had an influence on me dropping out because they were out having fun." When asked directly, "Was the vice-principal glad to see you go?", Ethan answered suddenly and emotionally: "Oh yeah!" Ethan also suggested that his mother "had pretty well had it with me too." He continued: "When I dropped out of school, she didn't say anything about it. To be quite honest, she really didn't care anymore." When asked about his mother's attitude, Ethan replied rather forcefully: "She said, 'Find a job and get the hell out of my house!'" The following September, unsuccessful at securing employment, Ethan was scheduled to enroll in the an alternative educational program but failed to show up due to personal problems. By then, Ethan had lost all direction and focus in his life. The following month, Ethan's mental state deteriorated to such a low level that professional intervention was required.

Before Ethan's arrest, he had earned approximately 12 credits from high school, and he now wanted to continue his academic studies once released from custody. When interviewed, Ethan was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he had accumulated 3.5 credits to date. Further, he noted a strong desire to get as many academic credits as possible while in custody. When asked directly what advice he would give a friend who was considering leaving school, Ethan replied dejectedly: "I would tell him not to do it or advise him not to do it. You know, I couldn't really lecture him because then I would be a hypocrite." He added: "I would just make sure that he was aware of what happens when you make that decision and how badly you need to have schooling to survive today." Ethan expressed a need to turn his own life around by returning to high school once released from closed custody and eventually pursuing a career in social work. Finally, when asked if he thought he would do better in the high school setting now, he said: "Yup, I would probably still find it boring, but I would stick with it anyways."

Fraser's Story

Fraser was raised in an intact and stable family, where his parents were loving and actively involved in his life. He described his early years positively. Fraser maintained that he enjoyed school and considered his parents to be positive role models throughout his life. Furthermore, he noted a "great" relationship with all family members, especially his younger sibling, with whom he was very close. He attended two elementary schools from Grade 1 through 5, after which he completed Grades 6 through 8 at junior high. Fraser had no major behavioural concerns at home, and adequate controls were enforced by his parents: "My mom made me read for an hour or so each night from 6 o'clock to 7 o'clock, they would make me read and do homework on a regular basis." At school, his behaviour mirrored that of the home environment in several respects. He described his early grade-school years as uneventful and could not recall a single elementary school suspension. Fraser said, "I can't remember any suspensions. I was a pretty good kid. I was quiet and never got into much trouble." Further, Fraser was a "funny," "honest," and "happy" child who enjoyed participating in sports of all kinds including baseball, swimming and basketball.

Fraser recalled that at elementary school, he was an "average student" who had to study diligently to maintain acceptable grades. Despite his hard work, Fraser faltered academically in Grade 7 and was required to repeat the entire year. When asked directly, "Did you have any learning disabilities?" Fraser answered succinctly: "I had a speech problem when I was younger." When probed on the topic of learning disabilities, Fraser replied rather matter-of-factly: "I couldn't pronounce the letters. I kinda stutter sometimes. In Grade 1 and Grade 2, I had an ESL teacher, one of those teachers. She used to help me with my words and stuff." When asked directly, "Did you have a problem keeping up at high school?" Fraser answered quickly: "Yeah, I had problems." When probed further on the topic, Fraser recollected, "I didn't do the work and I skipped a lot."

As a teenager, Fraser became withdrawn and passive at home and spent a good deal of his free time either "hanging out" with friends, listening to music in his bedroom, or talking on the phone. According to Fraser, his friends had little involvement with the youth justice system, were generally the same age as he was, were well-behaved and polite towards his parents, but at the same time, could be problematic in the school milieu:

> Most of my friends failed their grades. They were some of the rougher guys, although a few of them were getting A's in the advanced and stuff, and would hang around us, but most of my friends just chilled back and skipped a lot.

Just before Grade 9, rigid parental controls on Fraser were loosened, and he enjoyed his new-found freedom. Not long into the school year, truancy was identified as a major problem, with him missing substantial portions of the semester: "Actually, for most of the time I would be in the school itself, in the cafeteria or parking lot." Fraser would skip several days in a row but noted the general pattern was one or two day a week: "I would skip maybe one day a week, but not all the time. Just occasionally I would take a Friday off . . . I would also skip at least one period a day." Fraser was, however, quick to point out "I was suspended twice, but not for skipping. When asked if skipping affected his grades, Fraser replied with a smile: "Yes, I guess you could say that. My marks ranged from probably high 50s to low 60s." Fraser acknowledged that his parents "were upset with [his] grades." He added: "They wanted me to do better in school. My mom told me that 'If you want to get a bad job, don't graduate from high school.'"

Fraser also suggested that boredom and choice of companions played a key role in his poor academic performance. Fraser explained: "I just find it boring. At the time I just didn't care about school. I started hanging out with the wrong people, drinking, smoking, and stuff." He continued: "Well, the school wasn't completely boring. I liked physical education and stuff. If I was doing stuff that interested me, that's when I would get involved." However, during Grade 9, Fraser had no involvement in extracurricular school activities, but within his neighbourhood, he enjoyed participating in a variety of "pick up" sports. When talking about companions and skipping, Fraser replied: "Usually like, you know, say if they have a ride or something, they will say, 'Let's go by the other school or check some more friends out, or just take some time off class and hang around.'" In class, Fraser was more of a comedian than a behaviour problem. In his own words: "I wasn't a class clown completely, but I would make jokes, and they [classmates] would look at me and laugh. But most of the time, I would listen and try to keep quiet and focused." He finished: "Before I got charged, I would get on the teacher's case. I might be a little loud and stuff, sometimes annoying, or I wouldn't do homework and stuff, but nothing major."

Problematic behaviour continued into Grade 10, resulting in a total of two high school suspensions "for smoking on school property." When asked what he did on his days off, Fraser responded: "Just watch TV and smoke at home." Fraser's behaviour became progressively worse. He was associating with companions who were well-known to police besides skipping school regularly and using and abusing drugs and alcohol. Fraser finally had enough of the high school environment and dropped out of school; however, he did eventually return for second semester. Reflecting on the first semester, Fraser said: "I failed a lot . . . geography, science . . . I failed most of the first semester, well, actually all." Despite Fraser's problematic behaviour, he noted that the vice-principal "was fair most of the time." Asked if he liked the vice-principal, Fraser said that "He was very generous. Well you know, I was doing very bad in the first semester when I was doing crime and getting bail and stuff, that was in September." He concluded: "That semester I was still doing bad, I didn't pass none of my courses and quit. So my vice-principal he seen what I was doing, so he put me on a contract when I came back. He gave me that second chance." When asked directly if leaving high school was his own idea, Fraser said, "It was a combination of me and my friends."

At the time of his offence, Fraser was not attending school and had a great deal of idle time on his hands. However, as part of his bail condition, he was ordered to attend school and obey the curfew stipulated by the courts: "Well, when the judge said I had to go to school the next semester, I passed my subjects and did like 70s and stuff like that." Apparently, his attendance and marks improved substantially, and he had few problems abiding by the terms of strict bail conditions. Evidently, Fraser thrived academically in this controlled environment.

Before incarceration, Fraser had earned roughly 14 credits towards his secondary school diploma. When interviewed, Fraser was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he had accumulated 7.5 credits to date. More recently, he had enrolled in four other courses at the general level and reported no difficulties: "Now I have a positive feeling for school. I want to graduate." When asked to reflect on his future, Fraser said his plans included completing both high school and community college. Fraser further noted that he wanted to pursue a diploma in dramatic arts. He explained: "Actually, I don't know what I want to do with my life. Graduation is the first goal, then probably go to college. I want to go to college for sure, but I don't know for what, maybe dramatic arts." Finally, when asked directly, "What advice would you give to a friend who was considering leaving school?" Fraser said: "I would tell him no, you should go to school, you need the schooling for a better job. You don't want to do a McDonald's job your whole life."

Greg's Story

Greg's parents separated when he was age 4, and until his most recent incarceration, he resided in his mother's home. As a youngster, Greg was raised in an environment marked by financial difficulties and divorce. Other transitional events included the family's immigration to Canada besides the remarriage of both natural parents: "Yeah, my dad is remarried. My mom, she remarried and divorced again." As noted in Chapter 5, Greg's parents separated amicably and remained in positive communication with one another throughout his formative years. During these early years, frequent household moves resulted in four different elementary school placements. Regardless, Greg reported that he looked upon relocating as positive since he enjoyed making new friends.

In elementary school, Greg was an extremely cheerful, entertaining, and athletic child who could occasionally be the class clown: "Like I got along with the teachers because when I am around people, I have a good sense of humour and make them laugh and stuff, and all that." On the topic of elementary school teachers, Greg noted, "They were good." When asked to evaluate the elementary school system, Greg responded tersely: "I would say it's good but not perfect. The high school system I don't really know, I wasn't there long enough." Although Greg had no academic problems in elementary school, he periodically misbehaved and recalled a total of "10 suspensions" or "something like that." When probed on the topic of school suspensions, Greg shrugged his shoulders, replying solemnly: "Yeah, I fought in school and got suspended for that." He added: "It happened a couple of times." When asked directly, "Did these suspensions affect your grades?", Greg answered succinctly: "No, my grades were still good." He had a good relationship with his mother and recalled doing homework "up until Grade 8" and obeying curfew: "When I was out, say that was in Grade 8, I would come in when my mom told me." Greg reported a history of participation in extracurricular activities, particularly school sports: "I did basketball, track, cross-country, all of that."

Greg's mother had a normal pregnancy and birth, and he attained typical developmental milestones. Apparently, Greg was an able student when motivated to be so. Moreover, he received the Math Award five years in a row. Although Greg could attain good grades at school, which he occasionally did, peer pressure and gang involvement may have interfered with his ability to reach his full academic potential: "Well, considering the number of gangs that didn't get along in our school, I would say it definitely affected my schooling and grades." He concluded: "It was mostly because of gang stuff, though. First we were having some rumbles in my school, then it got more serious."

Greg created few serious problems at school until he was approximately age 14. Throughout the first semester of Grade 9, Greg displayed problematic behaviour with increasing incidents of truancy and fighting, which translated into frequent suspensions and low achievement, besides judicial interventions. Greg began drinking, smoking marijuana, selling drugs and associating with companions who were well-known to police. When asked directly, "What type of people did you hang out with?" Greg snapped: "The gang." When queried further on the topic of gangs, Greg recalled that "We all carried knives and guns at school." Asked where he kept his gun while in class, Greg said, "In my pocket. It was a 38 [caliber]."

Teachers had difficulty motivating Greg, and he was inconsistent in following directives and could also be extremely disrespectful and confrontational. Greg explained: "It didn't matter what the teacher said, we didn't listen. If we get kicked out of class, we don't care. It is just an excuse to go home." Greg recalled that some of his teachers were strict, and that he often "mouthed off" and made verbally aggressive statements. When asked, "Did you ever ask these teachers to lighten up?" Greg answered: "Not in those kind of words." He continued: "I would tell them, 'Fuck off and don't talk to me like that.' I would explain it to them first and then if they did it again, I'd just lose it. First I'd try to explain to them, I'd say, 'Hey, one day a kid is just going to knock you out if you try to talk to people like that, you know,' but it doesn't work." When asked if he had ever physically assaulted a teacher, Greg said, "No, I would just leave. They would try and yell in my face, and I would just leave and say, 'Who cares?'" At the same time, Greg noted that, on the whole, he liked most of his teachers and especially admired the vice-principal: "I think they [teachers] are doing their job. When I was getting out of jail, they still like gave me chances and tried to help me out." He concluded: "The vice-principal, I liked her. She like believed in me and stuff."

The problematic factors that impeded Greg's success in the first semester of Grade 9 carried over to the second semester. Following an assault charge for fighting on school property, Greg was transferred to the Alternative Suspension School and apparently enjoyed this new setting: "It's more like a living room than a classroom. And like near the end of the day, we would have like a group conversation. So [the teacher] would tell us to pick a topic and just talk about something." Greg added: "It's a lot better than the boot camp style." Apparently, Greg's marks and attendance improved considerably; however, due to his criminal lifestyle, he was not successful. Around this time, Greg became involved with the youth justice system, at first being placed on probation for several minor thefts and later receiving a secure-custody disposition for more serious indictable offences. Greg explained: "I have been doing school like on and off. I got arrested for robbery and I was sent to [correctional institution name omitted] and then in open custody."

According to Greg, indifference to school rules, truancy, gang involvement, criminal involvement, financial problems, and part-time employment were primary reasons for his limited academic success and early withdrawal: "Grade 9, that is when I dropped out of school. I just stopped going." Greg went on to say that money was partly to blame for his early withdrawal from school: "Yeah, money was a factor because most of the time you're out from the night till when everybody is leaving for school." When probed further on the topic of dropping out of school, Greg said: "From 5 o'clock to 12 at night, I would be working for [company name omitted]. He added: "After 12 o'clock came around, I would go back on the block and sell some drugs until the morning time, and then just go to sleep, and wake up and go back to work." When asked what his mother thought about him sleeping in, Greg remarked: "Most times I wasn't home." When asked directly, "You're telling me that your mother never caught on to your lies and excuses?", Greg answered slowly as he gnawed on his fingernails: "Yeah, she did after a while. It catches up to you, but by the time, I was already deep into it. There is not too much she could do." When asked to explain what his mother said about his early school departure, Greg replied:

> I don't know, it was kind of different the way my situation was. I didn't like just drop out. Like I always had an excuse for everything, you know. So my mom

> asked me why I dropped out, I can't really just go up to my mom and say, "Hey I'm selling drugs this and that, that's it." So I have to always make excuses. So I tell my mom, "Hey", she knows about the fights that happened in school because they called, so I say "Hey, I'm not going to school because those guys are going to get me back." So I just don't go.

Before incarceration, Greg had earned roughly 13 credits towards his secondary school diploma. When interviewed, Greg was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking three Grade 10 courses and one Grade 11 course at the general level. Greg's plans included finding part-time employment, returning to high school on a daily basis, and staying out of trouble. When asked whether he wanted to obtain post-secondary credentials, Greg said: "Well, before I was like 'fuck school,' but now I know what it's like, coz I've seen the light. Plus I already have enough money to go to college." Finally, when asked, "What advice would you give to a friend who was considering leaving school?" Greg said: "I would try to keep them in and try to talk them out of it, but in the long run, it's still their decision." He concluded: "But I have something else you wouldn't have. I have the personal experience to share with them too."

Hugh's Story

Before elementary school, Hugh was raised in an unstable and turbulent environment marked by parental substance abuse, neglect, marital discord, and financial difficulties. Hugh went from one parent to the other and experienced at least three brief placements with the local youth services. His household also moved several times, although his environment was fairly stable by his first year of school. Hugh attended three elementary schools between kindergarten and Grade 8, citing problematic behaviour and many suspensions. When asked how many times had he been suspended from elementary school, Hugh said: "About 25 times or more. . . . I was the class clown and a real little troublemaker." When probed on the topic of being a "troublemaker," Hugh replied theatrically: "My first day of kindergarten, I almost got suspended. I cut some girl's long hair and pulled the fire alarm." He concluded: "I was not only bad that year, but all the school years; I was just corrupt. I was always fighting and getting suspended and getting detentions and stuff."

Hugh recalled that in senior elementary school, he was suspended several times for fighting, mouthing off to teachers, rejecting school rules, and for skipping. However, he was quick to point out "I always made it to elementary school in the morning. My mom was the bus driver to that school, so I had no other choice. I was there every day." Hugh also remarked that he "got lots of detentions and had to go." When questioned on the topic of detentions, Hugh replied: "I had to go to my detentions, it was a little hick town school in the middle of nowhere. Out in the country, you go to little hick town schools, and you had your detentions during recess, instead of after school." He concluded, "I was forced to go, otherwise I would have gone home."

When Hugh was a youngster, he was diagnosed as having an Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, but was not placed on Ritalin. When asked directly, "Do you have any learning disabilities?" Hugh answered forcefully: "Yes, but I know they're full of shit." When probed further on the topic, he replied: "I'm trying to think." Then he continued: "Short attention span or something like that. When I was growing up, my mom wouldn't let the doctors give me any friggin pills to take. I was a hyper kid, but still my mom wouldn't let them feed me any drugs." Hugh had a low frustration level and could be extremely impulsive, arrogant, and oppositional to teachers. However, Hugh described himself as an average student with no learning disabilities who was "taking the general program at high school." He added: "I didn't find school difficult at all, it was easy. I could have done the advanced stream in high school if I wanted to. It was just getting me there and keeping me there."

Hugh's work habits were unsatisfactory in most subjects, and he reported that he had "below average marks in subjects [he] didn't care for." Hugh had a lackadaisical attitude to school work and "just did enough homework to get by." He was not consistent in his work habits and neglected many assignments because he "wasn't there long enough" and "didn't like certain courses." However, Hugh obtained above average marks in math and physical and health education. Predictably, Hugh said that "I like math, and of course, I love phys. ed."

When Hugh was 12, he uncovered the identity of his biological father and soon changed caregivers; Hugh had very little previous contact with his father. Moreover, a distinct change in behaviour occurred when Hugh relocated to his father's home. Although Hugh had displayed problematic behaviour in the past, his defiance intensified, and he began causing serious problems at school. Hugh disregarded corrective direction and was verbally abusive to school staff. He was chronically truant from school, routinely neglected his school work, and had anger management problems: "Anger just runs in the family. Like I know how to deal with it at times, but if I'm going to snap, I am going to snap." By the time Hugh was age 13, he was skipping school regularly and associating with companions who were well-known to police. Hugh then became involved with the youth justice system. He also began running away from home, drinking alcohol, and using drugs: "I had dope on me at all times but I didn't smoke it. Either after school or first thing in the morning when I'm walking to school or something like that." He concluded: "It kinda burnt you out if you did it in the morning, it was usually in the afternoons."

Hugh's behaviour became progressively worse, and by the time he was 14, he had been incarcerated in both secure and open-custody settings. Hugh was also causing serious discipline and behavioural problems at high school, causing both teachers and administrators much concern. Hugh vandalized school property, attempting to set a garbage can on fire near one of the school doors, and skipped class regularly. When asked to discuss his dealings with the school attendance office, Hugh responded rather curtly: "Well, let's just say we were on a first-name basis." When asked directly, "How often were you suspended in Grade 9?" Hugh answered: "Is 'a lot' a number?" When probed further on the topic, Hugh recalled that he was suspended 5 to 10 times: "The VP and principal didn't like my behaviour, they hated me. They were always trying to turn me around and get to me." Hugh added: "They said, 'You got to change, young man, or we're going to kick you out of our school.'" He concluded: "It never got to the kick-out stage at that school because I got picked up by the cops and went to jail." Although Hugh was not particularly fond of administration, he did acknowledge that "They were always positive when I got in trouble. They would call me down to the office or whatever and say, 'You have to get your act together, but we will help you out if we can.'"

Hugh's chronic rejection of authority, past serious behavioural conflicts, truancy, and indifference to school rules were primary reasons for his limited academic success and early withdrawal. However, he also noted that "friends and peer pressure" and involvement with the youth justice system had also played a significant role in his early school departure: "I awoled from open custody about six or seven times, so basically I quit school six or seven times. If I was on the run from the police, the last place I would show up is high school." When asked what his parents thought of him leaving school early, Hugh responded seriously: "They were really upset and disappointed with me. They were always trying to give me advice and different routes to take in life." He added: "I was just one of those kids that wouldn't listen, it went in one ear and out the other. Their advice makes sense to me now, but at the time it didn't." Hugh was studying at the general level in Grade 9 before dropping out of high school and had acquired very few high school credits towards his secondary school diploma. Further, he recalled that he "went over Grade 9 three times in a row" and had attended a total of four different high schools. Most recently, he had enrolled in a vocational school for approximately one month. Hugh described his last school years:

> The last full year I completed was Grade 8. I went to Grade 9 and then jail, and, you know, it just got all mixed up, and then I ended up getting maturity credits or something like that, so I just went into Grade 10. I got picked up by the police on the twenty-sixth of September, right after school started. When I was in school I did good, it was just keeping me in school.

At the time of interviewing, Hugh was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking a full academic workload consisting of three Grade 10 courses and one Grade 11 course. He noted that his most recent transcript showed several credits, most received through custodial schools. He wanted to obtain as many credits as possible during his lengthy incarceration, with his ultimate goal being Grade 12: "Once I get myself stable with my own apartment, I don't care if I'm 20 or 21, just as long as I have myself stable. It won't be that late, but I plan on getting my Grade 12." He finished: "It's important because you need it for jobs in the future." Hugh had not yet selected a career path, but noted a strong desire to secure employment in order to support his girlfriend and child. Finally, when asked, "What advice would you give to a friend who was considering leaving school?", Hugh said: "I would just explain to them what I went through and where quitting school has gotten me, well, maybe where it put me, and it didn't put me too damn far."

Ian's Story

Ian came from a middle-class family and grew up in a comfortable home environment. However, throughout Ian's childhood, the family moved often in search of a higher standard of living. Despite frequent relocations, Ian described his early grade-school years as satisfying and enjoyable, although he never developed any enduring friendships. Ian completed most of his education in large metropolitan centres where he transferred among "10-plus" different elementary schools before entering the secondary school system. Regardless, he had apparently managed to obtain "all A's and B's" and recalled no school suspensions.

Ian noted that "before Grade 10," he was, in fact, a good student who "worked hard in school" to fulfil his father's high expectations. When asked directly, "Were your parents happy with your marks in elementary school?" Ian said: "Yeah, in elementary, but not in high school." Ian described himself as an average and quiet student with few academic problems. He was extremely well-behaved at home, especially in the presence of his father. Ian helped with household chores, attended school on a daily basis, and did not display any real behavioural problems at school. Although his school performance was quite good, Ian commented "I didn't get along with my teachers." However, when probed on the topic of teachers, Ian concluded: "Yeah, they were all right." Furthermore, Ian reported a history of participation in school and community activities, especially sports.

In Grade 9, Ian was a conscientious student who displayed ambition and determination to succeed scholastically, obtaining marks in the eighty percentile range. Ian also noted that Grade 9 was enjoyable and productive, despite having to attend two schools because of the family's relocation. He said he was motivated and challenged by academic courses and particularly liked mathematics. Ian remarked that he studied at the advanced level and cited no course failures until Grade 10. When probed on his reasons for studying at the advanced level of instruction, Ian said: "I studied at the advanced level because I wanted to go to university and get a good job." When asked directly, "What courses did you find most boring?" He said: "I find science boring, I hate English, but I hate French the most, man." Although Ian was an exceptional athlete with above average marks in physical and health education, he expressed a surprising dislike for the subject in the school milieu: "No, I don't like phys. ed. at school. I don't like changing clothes. I go to school and dress up all nice, then I have to change."

When Ian was 16, the family relocated to another province so that his father could take advantage of a lucrative business opportunity. This ambitious business venture apparently failed, and according to Ian, his father began to gamble excessively. When asked if his parents still worked, Ian responded guardedly: "She doesn't work no more. He doesn't work no more neither, he went bankrupt." Further, his father's bankruptcy required both parents to collect government assistance, which according to Ian, was "hard for my father." His father's financial and gambling problems generated a fracture in the marital union, which later ended in divorce. Ian claimed his school difficulties began around this time. In Grade 10, he began associating with students either regarded as troublemakers or gang members, and his marks began to slide. The situation went from bad to worse in a relatively short time, and Ian failed "both science and history." However, Ian was quick to note that besides truancy and low achievement, he displayed few behavioural problems in class and "didn't get into any trouble at school." He concluded: "When I am in the classroom, I am doing work."

By the second semester of Grade 10, Ian had moved out of his mother's house against her wishes, and in his own words, "had moved in with five friends with criminal records, and didn't go to school." When asked what his parents thought about him moving out of the house, Ian said: "They didn't want me to leave. They tried to encourage me to stay, but I said, 'That's life, I'm leaving.'" At this time, Ian was not responding to interventions by his parents; instead, he was drawn to a socially deviant lifestyle that included gang membership. Besides using alcohol and experimenting with illegal drugs, Ian began skipping "two or three periods a day" and showing up "late every day." Asked why he started skipping class, Ian said: "I don't know. I was getting high with my friends." On the topic of drugs, Ian noted "Yeah, I abused alcohol and weed when I was about 15." He admitted that he started skipping school daily and began writing his own notes: "I am smart, you know, I write my own letters, I can write a good mom's letter, that is the only way to skip. They had over a hundred letters that I wrote, then they finally caught on." When queried about his attendance record, Ian said: "I missed over a hundred days. I remember that because they [school administration] kept track of that."

When requested to reflect on his dealings with school administration, Ian pondered the question, then said: "They came and talked to my parents. They didn't do much about my skipping, though, they just said, 'Go back to school.' So I went and I didn't get in trouble." He added: "But I felt bad because I disappointed my parents." Because of Ian's low academic performance, he was requested to transfer to another program: "Well, when I started skipping classes, my marks went low, right? So they asked me to change to the general instead of the advanced." He finished by saying: "I said, 'Go ahead, I don't care about school.'" When asked directly, "Did you find school boring?", he answered: "No, not really. I just know school is like that, and you have to sit there." Ian went on to say that "Yes, they [teachers] were nice," and that "Yeah, the vice-principal was cool." When asked why he had skipped so much school if he had liked it, Ian said: "The main reason I was skipping was to get high with my friends. They were doing crime and skipping and I just got caught up in that lifestyle and eventually quit school and teaching [sport name omitted]." Asked whom he blamed for his early school departure, Ian replied: "It was my fault." When probed on the topic of athletics and teaching, Ian said, "I quit teaching because I was hanging out and stuff, smoking got me tired. I'm a [title name omitted], and it's embarrassing when you can't compete no more, so I quit."

Ian's course failures and early departure from school may have been a direct result of personal tension created by gang involvement, early independence, school absenteeism, and alcohol and drug use. When asked to discuss his reasons for dropping out of school, Ian said: "Because I decided to move out with my friends, you know, and make some money." When probed further on the topic, Ian recalled that he dropped out of school primarily for two reasons: "Crime and weed." Ian went on to explain that he was up late "partying on school nights" and that "Yeah, I would be tired in the morning because I didn't get enough sleep." He finished: "If I was tired, I just didn't go to school." When asked to explain what his parents said about his quitting school, Ian responded: "They were disappointed."

Before incarceration, Ian had earned roughly 13 credits towards his secondary school diploma. At the time of this interview, Ian was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking three Grade 10 courses and one Grade 11 course at the general level. When asked whether he was going to obtain his Grade 12 diploma from the young offender school he replied: "I don't want it here, it's no good." His file described him as "a good student"; consequently, he was given special privileges to work on his educational courses outside regular school hours. Academically, Ian's plans included completing high school and then moving on to university where he would like to study business. He mentioned that he would like to be employed in the computer industry someday. Finally, when asked, "What do you miss about the regular high school environment?" Ian said: "Just waking up in the morning and washing my face and doing my own thing, carrying my knapsack. I just miss the routine of school."

Jack's Story

Jack was raised in a family marked by emotional abuse, family violence, alcoholism, poverty, and transiency. The family had many household moves eventually resulting in many school changes. When asked if he found frequent school changes difficult, Jack responded in a friendly manner: "I have been to about 15 schools from kindergarten to Grade 10. I am kind of used to that now, it's no big deal anymore." On closer examination, Jack recalled attending "9 elementary schools" from Grades 1 through 8, admitting that he was, in fact, "suspended a couple of times for fighting."

In kindergarten, Jack experienced no major difficulties or problems; however, he recalled an immediate dislike for school. His difficulties in school surfaced in Grade 1 and coincided with the arrival of his surrogate father into the family. Jack described his stepfather as "nothing but an alcoholic" who was "smoking dope all the time." As noted in Chapter 5, Jack's mother may have also had substance-abuse problems. In general, Jack's early formative years were spent in a hostile atmosphere of unending sarcasm and belittlement. Jack's remarks suggest that exposure to this truculent and derisive parenting style very likely affected his personality: "[My stepfather] didn't say much to me when he was sober. It's just when he was drunk, he started mouthing off and never had anything good to say about me." Jack internalized his family problems and acknowledged a transference of his anger to the school environment. He began to vent his displeasure at school through temper tantrums, power struggles, property destruction, and defiance. Jack also stated he was the "class clown at school" and was "constantly showing off" to gain attention and popularity.

Apparently, Jack was required to repeat Grade 1 due to behavioural difficulties, truancy, and lack of interest in school. Identified as an "exceptional/ special needs student," he was forced to attend a class for emotionally disturbed and behaviourally difficult children. "When I failed Grade 1, I was put into a special education class at [school name omitted]," said Jack. From Grades 2 to 4, he displayed problematic behaviour in the classroom, including disobedience, defiance, and academic difficulties. By Grade 5, Jack's overt aggressive and destructive personality was well-known to teachers, administrators, and fellow students. However, Jack promptly pointed out that he rarely fought in class and never threatened teachers: "I have never threatened a teacher, I'm not that kind of person, but in Grade 8, I did get into a fight with another kid. That was the first time I ever got into a fight in class." He added: "Never before that or after that." When asked to discuss his typical classroom deportment, he replied: "I just did real stupid things like shooting peas from a straw and bothering other kids in the class and stuff like that. I would mouth off to other kids and talk back to my teachers or whatever."

Apparently, Jack was a capable student when motivated to be so. However, he remarked that he had "a hard time concentrating in class" for any extended periods of time. In semester one of high school, Jack evidently did quite well scholastically, obtaining marks in the 80 percentile range at the general level of instruction. One report noted that Jack "can do really well academically, if he wants to and has proven this on occasion." In semester two, Jack stumbled academically and decided he wanted to restructure his life by moving to his natural father's house so that he could attend a new school. This endeavour was short-lived, and Jack failed both personally and scholastically.

Although Jack was quite an able student at times, peer pressure interfered with his ability to reach his full potential. His choice of companions seemed to affect his scholastic performance: "Well, my friends kinda influenced me to skip school and drop out of school too. Like when they skipped, I skipped. They would always try to get me to skip when they were taking off." Jack added: "Sometimes they didn't skip like they said, and I would be beat for going to class, because I would be looking around waiting 15 minutes. So if I was 15 minutes late for class, I usually wouldn't bother going." When asked directly, "How often would you skip school?" Jack answered: "Three or four days out of five."

In Grade 10, Jack began drinking, experimenting with illegal substances, and associating with the wrong crowd, besides skipping school regularly: "Probably 50% of my friends have either dropped out of school or have been kicked out, but the other guys that are still in school aren't doing too good. They're real trouble-makers most of the time." Administrative efforts to help Jack were relatively unsuccessful; nevertheless, they did leave a lasting impression on him:

> No, administration didn't try to help me out at high school. Well, they gave me a second chance and stuff, but I had to go to this learning room. I was working on correspondence courses for two periods a day and then I gave up on that, it was so lame and boring. Then I just didn't go back.

When asked in an open-ended manner to further reflect on his dealings with school administration, Jack said with a hint of a smile: "The vice-principal was all right to me. This was her first year, I think, but the principal was really good." He added: "I don't know, like I can't run Mr. [principal's name omitted] down or anything because it was mainly my own damn fault for being kicked out of school." Jack noted he "had a negative attitude towards school back then, I don't know why exactly. I think it was because of the people I hung around with." He concluded: "They [his friends] didn't like school either and my marks were never good. I just got really frustrated in school and said, 'The hell with it.' I sorta gave up."

By the second semester of Grade 10, Jack faltered dramatically; his marks plummeted to the 25 percentile range because of truancy and his disrespect for school personnel. When asked if he had ever failed a high school course, he said: "Yeah, lots. This is my fifth time taking Grade 10 math, and I have taken Grade 10 English four or five times, and oh yeah, history twice." Jack explained that he "only liked a couple" of his teachers. When asked why, Jack said: "Because they were the classes I liked. They were male teachers and I have more respect for them." He explained: "Female teachers bother me, and I just don't listen to them." Further, he declared that classes "are just too big at this school" and outlined his frustration with the educational system:

> There shouldn't be so many kids in class. It's hard to get help from the teacher when you want it. In a big school, the teacher doesn't pay much attention to you when you need help. Like if you put your hand up or something, it takes them forever to help you, and they just skim through it real fast, and then you don't understand them.

Jack's lack of motivation, truancy, and indifference to school rules were primary reasons for his limited academic success and early withdrawal. Jack explained: "I got kicked out in Grade 10 . . . for fighting in the parking lot, mouthing off, and not going to school. I found school boring." He added: "When I skipped, I would usually go down to the river and hang out with my friends and play hacky sack or whatever." When questioned about school boredom, Jack replied in a soft-spoken manner: "I don't know, maybe I have an attention deficit or something. I daze off and daydream in class and just find it boring." He concluded: "Tech is good, but I really find English and math dull and boring."

Jack enrolled in several other high schools, but was asked to leave each one of them due to truancy and behavioural and academic difficulties. Moreover, Jack was eventually expelled from the secondary school system. Jack acknowledged feeling alienated and rejected after being expelled from high school: "Yeah, I felt really left out of things when I got expelled because I wasn't allowed near the school property or nothing. Like, when I went to school, I usually skipped and then hung out with my friends." He concluded: "After I got expelled, I didn't see my friends as much." When asked directly, "Did you want to leave the high school environment?" Jack said: "I don't know, kinda and kinda not. When I went to school, I never did go to class a lot, but I wanted to go to school so I could just hang around with my friends." On the advice of his "favourite principal," Jack enrolled in an alternative learning program, but soon withdrew due to his involvement with the youth justice system. Jack realized that he had let down "his favourite principal":

> He gave me a few chances to come back, but then I screwed up. Then he said, this time he wants me to complete at least one credit at another school. So I was going to the Adult Education Centre at [school name omitted], and then I could go back to [high school name omitted], his school, but then I told him I couldn't get my one credit, because I would be in jail. He said, "Even better, make sure you go to school there and get your one credit."

Apparently, Jack had earned nearly 13 credits towards his secondary school diploma. At the time of this interview, Jack was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking four Grade 10 courses at the general level. Once released from closed custody, Jack plans to complete secondary school while residing at his mother's home and then eventually go on to college: "Yeah, I plan to go to college someday. I have actually looked into courses here. I've looked into the drafting program at [college name omitted], but really don't know for sure where I want to go." Jack had vague plans for employment, saying he wanted to do "drafting or something along that line."

Kyle's Story

Kyle described his formative years as relatively normal in all respects. He was involved in Cubs, music, sports, and a variety of other organized activities and was comparatively "well-behaved" and "outgoing." As a couple, his parents attended school plays, activities, and meetings, and in general, showed their love and affection for Kyle. Kyle also reported attending three different elementary schools from Grades 1 to 8. By most accounts, he was an average student academically with only minor behavioural problems in his early grade-school years. When asked if he had a history of low grades in elementary school, Kyle said with a sigh, "No." When probed further on the topic, Kyle recalled: "In elementary school, my marks were average, I would say a B minus or so, I was a pretty good student back then." However, he noted a total of three elementary-school suspensions: "I got into a few fights in elementary school and got suspended, but nothing real serious, though."

Kyle caused few problems at school until the end of Grade 7 when his parents separated. Shortly after the marital separation, Kyle moved in with his father, who was living in a common-law union with his girlfriend. From that point onward, Kyle's natural mother did not play a maternal role in his life, and he had only tenuous contact with her. Kyle maintained that his surrogate mother was strict, but noted that she had several redeeming qualities: "She was really strict, one of those type of people. She's like, 'Where you going, when you going to be in, who are you going out with,' that kind of talk, you know." He concluded: "But she's okay at times."

Soon after he settled into his new school, Kyle's behaviour started to become problematic. He abandoned most of the community and extracurricular activities he was involved in but did continue to play high school football. His marks began to slide, and he was required to attend an anger-management program due to his overt aggressive behaviour in class: "Yeah, I have an anger-management problem and a bad temper, usually when I am drinking. Like before I got here, I was in a couple of fights when I was drunk." When asked hypothetically, "What would your reaction be if another student intentionally challenged you at school?" Kyle pondered the question, then replied: "We'd be going, man, right there and then in the hallway. I'd probably punch him and it would be on."

In his early teen years, Kyle began to use drugs and alcohol on a regular basis, eventually affecting his scholastic performance. When asked if he ever abused drugs or alcohol, Kyle responded; "Yes, both. At first it was alcohol and then drugs. I still have a little bit of a problem, you know." He added: "I am going to AA in here, so I am going to try to stay away from the drug-and-alcohol scene. Well, when I get out I may drink a little bit, but that's it." Kyle further explained that his drug of choice was "probably herbs and pot." He concluded, however, "In the past I have done coke a few times, crack, mushrooms, peyote, ecstasy, and stuff like that. I have never busted a vein or anything, but it screws you up." Kyle conceded reduced cognitive functioning from his abuse of drugs and alcohol, but minimized the side effects and impact on his life.

When asked if drugs or alcohol were factors in his early departure from high school, Kyle remarked: "You see, the drinking, I don't drink that much during the school week, mostly just on the weekends. Except for like if I'm skipping school, and not doing anything, then I can drink all day long." He added: "But with the pot, it's always both school days and weekends. There is so much dope in our school that you can see a smoke cloud over the top of the school a mile away." By the time he was 15, Kyle had a severe substance-abuse problem and thereafter participated in several programs, including a very expensive residential drug-treatment program.

Kyle felt neither rejected by nor alienated from the educational system; however, he did find it "a little bit boring." When quizzed on the topic of boredom, Kyle paused momentarily to look out the window, then elaborated: "Just some of the classes like math and science and stuff like that were boring. Some of the teachers were pretty bad too, and that didn't help." Kyle said these were the teachers who "were so by the book, you know." Kyle eagerly pointed out, "Overall, I liked most of my teachers," but also noted "quite a few run-ins with the VP." When asked what precipitated these "run-ins," Kyle chuckled, then commented: "I would skip class a lot, and smoke a lot of dope, and always smell like dope."

Kyle commented that "It all started in Grade 9, when I started partying and stuff like that," a statement which may in part explain one factor contributing to Kyle's early school withdrawal. In high school, his marks began to decline, and his behaviour became progressively worse. Kyle remarked that he did some homework in high school but "not a lot, just enough to get my grades and get by." When asked how many times he had been suspended from high school, Kyle said, "20 times." He added: "I mostly got suspended for smoking dope on school property, fighting, and skipping." In addition to attendance and attitudinal problems, lack of motivation, alcohol and drug problems, part-time employment, and early independence, frequent placements in treatment centres may have contributed to his dropping out in Grade 9. He explained: "Well, I probably left school because I was living on my own and I had to work. Well, I kinda got the boot from my dad and his girlfriend's house and this didn't help things either." When asked to explain what his parents said about his early school departure, Kyle responded: "She [natural mother] was pretty upset I guess, so was my dad." Asked if he planed to return to school, Kyle said: "Well, I will get a job or see if I can get welfare or something and then go to night school."

Kyle was studying at the basic level of instruction before leaving school and mentioned that he had obtained no academic credits to date, an assertion confirmed by collateral reports. When interviewed, Kyle was enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking four Grade 10 courses, two at the basic and two at the general level. He noted some anxiety and apprehension about the correctional facility but mentioned that the only goal he really wanted to accomplish at the young offender facility was to attend the academic program and obtain as many credits as possible: "You can't really do anything without high school, so I want to do that, then go to college." Kyle suggested no concrete plans for the future, but said he wanted to complete high school someday, then perhaps move on to college and maybe join the Armed Forces. Asked what he wanted to take at college, Kyle said, "Probably business. My plan is that I want to get into the military and then take it from there." Further, in the immediate future, he wanted to obtain part-time employment in "sales" and eventually get his own "pad."

Leonard's Story

Leonard's early years were fraught with many problems, including childhood abuse, emotional neglect, parental rejection, familial separation and substance problems. Leonard had attended six elementary schools from kindergarten to Grade 6 and reported no learning problems, though he had admittedly experienced "difficulties in paying attention." Further, Leonard noted a total of five elementary-school suspensions. Leonard's natural parents lived in a common-law union and then separated when he was 7 years old. Judicial complications surrounded the separation, but eventually Leonard's father obtained sole custody of the children. When asked directly if either of his natural parents remarried, Leonard replied: "They both live common-law. Well, my father was common-law married until they separated a while ago. My mother is still living common-law married and working in [city name omitted]."

The collapse of the relationship was difficult for Leonard, partly because his mother withdrew all contact from family members. Leonard was close to his mother, and her decision to end the relationship saddened and later angered him. To help him deal with the loss of his mother, Leonard was enrolled in therapy. Despite the turmoil in his life, Leonard did reasonably well in school and apparently attained average marks: "I never failed anything in elementary school, I always passed. I did pretty well all through elementary school. I was just an average student getting B's and C's and stuff." Although he had participated in a few organized activities, Leonard noted that he was quite unproductive in his spare time. When asked directly if he had done any homework in his spare time, he noted succinctly that he did.

Soon after the separation of his natural parents, Leonard's father entered another common-law relationship. However, when Leonard was approximately 13 years old, this union disintegrated. Leonard's stepmother subsequently obtained custody of her natural child and chose to end the relationship with her stepchildren. From that point onward, Leonard's surrogate mother did not play a maternal role in his life and had no contact with the family. It is unknown how his surrogate mother's rejection affected his scholastic performance, but Leonard recalled that he had many sad nights and that his schooling suffered immensely. He explained: "The separation made me angry and I blamed myself a little. My marks at school were also affected." Leonard soon began to exhibit an increase in behavioural problems in a wide range of personal and social contexts: "My grades were pretty good until my father and stepmother split up, and then they just went downhill." Financial difficulties also plagued the family, affecting Leonard's mental state, thus also affecting his schooling.

His senior years at elementary school were not successful. Leonard lost interest and motivation in school, his marks began to slide, he started skipping school, and his behaviour became problematic: "Yeah, I became a behaviour problem in elementary school after my parents split up." Leonard explained: "I was an attention-seeker. I would hang around the boys and make them laugh. I was a class clown for sure." When asked to reflect on his dealings with teachers during this difficult time, Leonard paused, then said quietly: "They talked to my dad on a regular basis back then. My teachers and my dad had a really good relationship, and they were both interested in what was going on in my life." Admittedly, Leonard was an underachiever, but "still passed everything." Although he reported no learning disabilities, he apparently had troubles concentrating in class.

From an early age, Leonard's father gave him mixed messages, at times being "pretty caring," and at other times being violent. When probed on the topic of violence, Leonard became suspicious of the line of questioning but did say that his father "mostly just yelled and stuff." When asked if his father was strict or lenient, Leonard answered: "Strict and lenient. I would say he is a combination of the both." Asked if the verbal abuse affected his schooling, Leonard paused for some time, then stated: "It probably did. It upset me quite a bit you know, he was always on my case, and it was stressful, I guess. He was pushing me all the time, but it wasn't a bad thing, but it affected me a bit."

By Grade 9, Leonard's school performance had deteriorated considerably, and he was troublesome for both administrators and teachers. When asked, "Did you like your teachers?" Leonard answered: "Yeah, a few of them I liked. I did well in those classes." He added: "Those teachers were able to sit down and talk to you one on one. They treated me with respect." On the topic of school "likes" and "dislikes," Leonard said, "I like phys. ed. and all the tech classes, that's about it." Evidently, Leonard was unsettled, stubborn, aggressive, and in general a disturbance in the educational setting. Leonard said: "In high school, I was a major problem for teachers." He added: "I was just disruptive. I was always causing trouble, being loud and not doing my work." When asked if he had ever assaulted a teacher, Leonard said, "No, no, no! I have never ever tried to assault a teacher, just arguments with them and stuff." He went on to say that "We got into arguments for stuff like 'Why isn't your homework done? Why are you being disruptive?' and for talking when I wasn't supposed to."

According to Leonard, he lost interest and motivation in school, clowned around, and was suspended at least five times for truancy and other antisocial behaviour: "Well, I got kicked out of school over the course of a year. I just kept skipping, kept skipping, kept skipping and my lack of behaviour in class didn't help things." Leonard also suggested that boredom, choice of friends, and number of household moves may also have played a key role in his unsatisfactory school performance: "I just wasn't interested in school. It was boring and also peer pressure, I guess. If all the guys didn't want to go to school that afternoon, we didn't," chuckled Leonard, as he stood up to look out the barred window. He concluded: "I'd get in the car, roll down the windows and say, 'Let's go, boys.'" Asked directly, "Were your friends a positive or negative influence on you?", Leonard settled back into the chair and said: "A bad influence . . . they influenced me to get in shit, then I got kicked out of school. I would also come in stoned after being out with them." When pressed on the topic of drugs and alcohol, Leonard said good-naturedly: "No, I didn't abuse the stuff. Like, I smoked drugs once in a while, but it wasn't in control of me." He finished: "And I have never been a real party-goer either." As mentioned in Chapter 5, the family moved several times, and Leonard recounted attending no less than "seven high schools." Apparently his father moved the family many times to avoid Leonard's natural mother. Leonard partly attributed his having to repeat Grade 9, and his skipping to these household moves.

This pattern of classroom disruption, clowning around, and skipping continued throughout the second semester, resulting in Leonard failing the year. By the end of Grade 9, Leonard had technically been expelled from high school: "I never dropped out of high school, I got kicked out in Grade 9 for skipping and being disruptive in class and stuff." Asked if he wanted to leave school, Leonard's voice trailed off: "I didn't want to, it was just like I had to . . . ." In fact, Leonard did not receive a single credit in his first year of high school. However, he did eventually complete Grade 9 sometime later through the adult learning centre.

Before incarceration, Leonard began a series of short-term living arrangements and, in general, was living a transient lifestyle. Leonard offered further insights into his reasons for living away from home:

> I had to get away from my dad, he pushed me a lot in school. Since I have been in here, I haven't been pushing myself as much to do things. He wanted me to be the best, but when I'm not being pushed all the time, I seem to do better. When the pressure is off, I can do a lot better.

At the time of his arrest, Leonard had earned several Grade 10 credits from the adult learning centre and apparently was doing quite well at the general level of instruction. Before his incarceration, Leonard had earned roughly 13 credits towards his secondary school diploma. When interviewed, Leonard had enrolled in the educational program at the detention facility where he was taking three Grade 10 courses at the general level. Leonard was unsure of where he would live after release from custody, but was quite certain he would return to school. He also mentioned that his long-range plans included enrolling in community college and pursuing a career in the restaurant industry. Finally, when asked what changes would have made school more helpful, Leonard replied:

> I would keep it independent, but I think the teachers need to talk to students more. I think they need to be more like a friend or something instead of being an authority figure. They shouldn't take their job so serious, they should just lighten up a bit and let their hair down.

Summary

This chapter presented its findings in relation to specific research question 3: What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' dropping out of high school? To relate the findings to the research question, individual life stories were presented in terms of the participants' educational histories. The chapter was organized into two main sections and drew together information from several sources but relied most heavily on interview data. The first section used a narrative format to describe the participants' educational background. The second section identified and discussed themes common to the individual cases. The findings of the present study were compared whenever possible with Canadian national data. To provide a framework for analysis, six key issues were addressed: (a) social climate: student-staff rapport, (b) attitudinal factors, (c) number of schools attended and suspensions, (d) cognitive ability, (e) school-behaviour problems, and (f) employment, finances, academic performance, and future plans. As a corollary to the discussion, six tables of comparative educational background data were also presented.

Several themes emerged from the individual educational perspectives and are summarised according to the order in which they appeared in the chapter. The data revealed that the participants were inclined to be less satisfied with their secondary than with their elementary school relationships. Moreover, approximately four-fifths of the participants reported positive relationships with their elementary school teachers, vice-principals, and principals. All 12 participants reported positive relationships with their elementary school teachers. As well, 10 and 11 participants, respectively, reported positive relationships with their elementary vice-principals and principals. On the contrary, a similar pattern was not found within the high school environment. Nine participants reported positive relationships with teachers, 5 participants noted positive relationships with vice-principals, while only 4 participants stated they had positive associations with their principals. These findings were generally consistent with the research literature.

With respect to alienation and isolation, the overall pattern suggested that the participants had experienced few problems in these areas. Specifically, 3 participants felt alienated and 3 participants felt isolated. One notable caveat to this analysis was that 2 of the same participants reported negative feelings in both categories. Unlike previous research findings, those in this area of study did not support the literature. The contradictory findings could in part be due to methodological differences. As well, the participants were also asked if they felt bored at school. Notably, two-thirds of the participants recalled varying degrees of boredom. The participants' overall consensus was that school had little relevance to their current lifestyle. The findings of the present study offer additional support to the literature emphasizing the influence of boredom in the early school-leaving process. Further, all 12 participants reported having friends while attending school. Finally, only one-third of the participants reported participation in extracurricular activities while attending high school. At least in high school, involvement in athletics and various other pursuits was not part of their daily routines.

In general, this study showed that most of the participants were highly mobile and had little stability in their lives. Specifically, the participants had attended an average of approximately 6 elementary and 4 secondary schools. Further, most of the participants had experienced several school suspensions. Overall, 10 of the 12 participants reported at least one elementary school suspension, the range for the respondent group being from none to over 25. A similar pattern also existed in high school. Eleven participants reported at least 1 high school suspension, the range of the total cohort being from none to over 20. The participants were also asked if they had skipped classes. All 12 participants reported, "Yes." As expected, the data contained a wide range of responses. With respect to attendance problems, the findings correspond quite closely with those in the research literature. Finally, all the participants had either dropped out of or been expelled from high school. The 4 participants who had been expelled also had histories of emotional and physical abuse besides parental rejection.

In the context of cognitive ability, 6 of the 12 participants had attended a remedial school program in the past. The participants were also asked if they were aware of any personal learning disabilities. Again, one-half of the participants reported, "Yes." Further, one-half of the participants noted problems keeping up academically. As might be expected, several participants had also repeated one or more grades during their elementary school years. As well, 4 of the 5 participants who had failed a grade did so in their later elementary school years. Nevertheless, IQ testing showed that, on the whole, the respondent group was of "average" intelligence. Moreover, the findings illustrated that when tested, the participants ranged in reading ability from 7.3 to 10.9, the mean and median reading levels for the respondent group being 8.7 and 8.4, respectively. Finally, the participants were asked about their most recent level of instruction at high school; 9 participants reported enrollment in the general level of instruction. The remaining 3 participants reported consignment to the basic level of instruction.

Over one-half of the participants had early (K to 4) behaviour problems at school. As well, 6 of the 7 participants who had experienced early behaviour problems at school also experienced early behaviour problems at home. Further, 10 participants recalled verbal confrontations with teachers, 3 participants recalled physical confrontations with teachers, while 10 participants noted physical altercations with other students. A consistent relationship between physical and verbal aggression towards others has been associated with early school leaving. Finally, two-thirds of the participants reported being the class clown while one-third recalled being school bullies.

With respect to work, finances, and future plans, several themes also emerged from the individual educational perspectives. In particular, the findings revealed that 7 of the 12 participants reported episodic employment during high school. Dissaggregating the data showed that 1 participant worked but "not legally," another participant worked full-time, while 5 participants reported part-time employment. Although the research evidence regarding employment was contradictory, the literature generally supported the contention that working during high school was considered negative. To discover if money played a role in the participants' decision to quit school, several questions were asked relating to this theme. Overall, 7 participants believed that financial considerations were involved in their decision to leave school early. The data concerning the number of high school credits revealed a good distribution. Ten participants reported at least two credits, the range of the total cohort being from 0 to 21.5. Further, participants were asked if they planned on returning to school once they were released from custody. Without hesitation, they all answered, "Yes." Correspondingly, all but 2 participants expressed some degree of commitment to obtaining post-secondary credentials. The participants were asked several open-ended questions relating to their employment goals. Notably, five-sixths of the participants stated that they had definite employment goals and one-quarter of these participants expressed a strong desire to pursue a military career. Why these 3 respondents did so is not known.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section theoretically elaborates the findings in relation to specific research question 2: What personal and family background factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school? The second section theoretically elaborates the findings in relation to specific research question 3: What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school? The chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

Analysis and Discussion of Life-History Perspectives

In Chapter 5, the participants' life stories were presented with an emphasis on the characteristics of their family backgrounds. A broad range of findings was derived by asking a series of open-ended questions and by analyzing documents. This section of Chapter 7 identifies and discusses common themes in the individual cases. To provide a framework for analysis, six key issue are addressed: (a) environmental stability, (b) child abuse, (c) family influences, (d) neighbourhood and community factors, (e) individual characteristics, and (f) companions. The discussion cites literature from theoretical and empirical studies. For the most part, educational and criminal characteristics are not analytically generalized in this section of the discussion, and, therefore, it should not be considered as a gestalt view of the participants' lives, but as one component of their larger social context.

Environmental Stability: Transition and Mobility

The following analysis provides specific information concerning the participants' environmental and geographic stability. Environmental instability is one of several risk factors related to early school leaving (e.g., Haveman et al., 1991) and delinquency (e.g., Hein & Lewko, 1994; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Oakland, 1992; Wilson & Howell, 1995). The number of household moves, number of detention facilities attended, transiency, homelessness, social-service placements, and early independence all contributed to creating a degree of environmental instability in the participants' lives. As noted in the life-history perspectives, several participants were highly mobile and had little stability in their lives. Most of them had lived in a wide assortment of accommodations and had moved from one parent to the other or from one friend to the other, besides living with acquaintances, relatives, and strangers. Young people who lack geographic and environmental stability in their lives may be at higher risk for psychological- and social-adjustment problems as well as being at risk physically (e.g., Attles, 1993; Gonzalez, 1991; Hein & Lewko, 1994; Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1989; James, Smith, & Mann, 1991; Kondratas, 1991; Lash & Kirpatrick, 1990; Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neemann, 1993; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991).

Some evidence cited in the literature suggested that children who move often and come from unstable family environments are more likely than other children to have behavioural problems or antisocial tendencies (e.g., Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Saner & Ellickson, 1996; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994). More precisely, other studies linked childhood homelessness to classroom-behaviour problems (e.g., Masten, 1992; Masten et al., 1993; Ziesemer et al., 1994). Naturally, a strong association exists between environmental instability and poor academic performance (e.g., Bruno & Isken, 1996; Crawley, 1987; Hein & Lewko, 1994; Ingersoll et al., 1989; Karp, 1988; Plankenhorn, 1989; Reynolds, 1989; Schuler, 1990; Ziesemer et al., 1994; Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994).

Noticeable differences exist between the participants in this study and the general profile of 15-to-18-year-olds in Canada. Census data for 1996 revealed that on average, 56.7% of residents in Canada lived in the same dwelling for at least five consecutive years. In contrast, the participants had experienced an average of at least 10 household moves, some participants experiencing five residential moves over a one-year period. Okey and Cusick (1995), using a qualitative approach, also found that frequent household moves occurred among their 12 dropout participants. What follows presents a summary of the number of correctional facilities attended by the participants. These data include both open and secure custodial placements and were gathered from institutional records. All the participants attended at least two different detention facilities, the mean, median, and modal number of placements being 6.3, 7.0, and 7.0, respectively. Although 4 participants had no previous terms of detention before their current conviction or convictions (see Chapter 4), they still had numerical values above one due to internal transfers and pre-trial incarceration.

The data reveal that most participants investigated in the present study had a history of family-crisis intervention. Placement in a family-crisis facility such as a foster or group home also contributed to a lack of continuity in the participants' lives. Three-quarters of the participants had experienced at least one placement with a social service agency. Research evidence reported in the literature suggested that children and adolescents who come into contact with social service agencies typically have more problems than their counterparts who have not had such contact. According to Raychaba (1992), many of these children have problems resulting from abusive histories and disruptive behaviours, while substantial numbers are plagued with depressive disorders, substance-abuse problems, learning problems, school failure, truancy, and early school leaving (e.g., Canadian Child Welfare Association, 1990, cited in Hein & Lewko, 1994; Oakland, 1992; Raychaba, 1989). The findings of the present study support those of the above literature review.

Within the context of environmental stability, just over half of the participants had (a) run away from home, (b) lived a transient lifestyle (i.e., they had recurrently wandered from one residence to another or lived on the streets for short or extended periods of time), (c) been asked to leave home, or (d) been locked out of the home. Six of these 7 participants also had a history of child abuse. Although why these participants left home at such a young age is not entirely clear, many seem to have been running from sometimes turbulent and stressful home environments. Predictably, these participants had experienced many problems, including high rates of abuse, poverty, school absenteeism, and failure. Research findings also pointed to a link between homelessness and child abuse (e.g., Garbarino, Wilson, & Garbarino, 1986; Janus, McCormack, Burgess, & Hartman, 1987; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). However, only a few researchers have focused specifically on the consequences of youth homelessness; most studies have tended instead to focus on the antecedents (Hagan & McCarthy, 1998). Nevertheless, available studies have documented such consequences as unemployment, poverty, criminal involvement, and school-dropout status (e.g., Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990, 1993; Windle, 1989).

Finally, 7 participants reported that before the age of 16, they had lived away from their parents' home. In several provinces, young persons 16 years of age or more are legally permitted to leave home (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992); however, children who take on adult roles prematurely put their education in jeopardy (e.g., Janosz et al., 1997; Oakland, 1992; Rosenthal, 1998). The research literature indicated that living independently at a young age is cause for concern. For example, McMullan et al. (1988) contended that absent family-support systems and early independence are risk factors associated with dropping out of school.

History of Child Abuse

What follows provides information concerning the extent and nature of child abuse among the participants. These data were collected from two sources. First, an institutional-file-review method was selected because of the topic's intrusive and sensitive nature. The secure-custody facility routinely updates its files, so the information was current and thorough. These files are ongoing, confidential records of a young offender's progress through the correctional and legal system. The files include documentation concerning criminal activity, mental health histories, and child-abuse accounts. Second, interviews were conducted to allow the participants to express their own views and opinions concerning these matters. Together, both methods provided a comprehensive view of the issue.

The respondents and their files reported varying accounts regarding child abuse (i.e., abuse before age 16) including abuse witnessed, physical and sexual abuse experienced, emotional abuse, and neglect. For this study, "witnessing abuse" was narrowly defined as witnessing physical or sexual assault by a family or community member. "Physical and sexual abuse" was defined as assault perpetrated by a guardian, parent or someone more than five years older than the victim. "Neglect" was defined as abandonment or failure to provide the necessities of life (Dutton & Hart, 1992; Widom, 1997). The distinction made between "neglect" and "abuse" may vary from study to study, making comparisons difficult (Weeks & Widom, 1998). In general, however, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse are "acts of commission," whereas neglect is considered as an "act of omission" (Barker, 1991; Briere, 1996).

Alksnis and Taylor (1995) emphasized the importance of exploring the issue of childhood abuse, pointing out that childhood abuse among offenders is "said to be the norm in such populations" (p. 6). Institutional data showed that approximately 70% of the institution's residents had childhood-abuse histories. Several research-based studies have also reported remarkably similar findings to those revealed in this present study (e.g., Feldman, Mallouh, & Lewis, 1986; Lewis et al., 1988a; Miller, 1990; Stein & Lewis, 1992; Weeks & Widom, 1998).

The documents showed that three-quarters of the participants in the present study had been exposed to some type of child abuse. The abuse rates for this study are much higher than those reported in a Health Canada report. For example, in 1998, approximately 2.0% of Canadian children aged 0 to 15 experienced some form of child abuse (Philp, 2001). In this study, 9 participants witnessed abuse, 6 participants were exposed to physical abuse, 1 participant was exposed to sexual abuse, 7 participants experienced emotional abuse, and 4 participants were neglected. In many respects, these findings mirror research results of other studies. These numbers are startling, considering that family-abuse incidents gathered from official records tend to underestimate the extent of the problem (e.g., Alksnis & Taylor, 1995; Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1994; Finkelhor & Zellman, 1991; Philp, 2001; Pierce & Pierce, 1985; Stein & Lewis, 1992; U.S. DHHS, 1988; Widom & Morris, 1997; Widom & Shepard, 1996) due to parental or victim denials or conservative fact-finding practices. Five recent studies reported that the childhood physical-abuse histories of offenders varied from 31% to 80% in correctional populations (Dutton & Hart, 1992; Robinson & Taylor, 1994; Stein & Lewis, 1992; Weeks & Widom, 1998; Widom & Shepard, 1996). The present study found that at least half of the participants had reported physical abuse at some point in the past. The results closely resemble the previously mentioned studies despite dissimilar research methods. The weight of the evidence suggests a connection between childhood physical abuse and subsequent deviant behaviour.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (1994) reported that approximately one million children in this country have witnessed serious acts of violence by one parent against the other. The centre also suggested that witnessing familial violence places children at risk due to enduring emotional repercussions. Viewing this matter from the "violence begets violence" or "cycle of violence" perspective (see Widom, 1989b, 1989c), several studies claimed that children, especially boys, who have witnessed abuse may be more overtly aggressive than their counterparts who have not witnessed abuse (e.g., Alksnis & Taylor, 1995; Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986; Kolko, Moser, & Weldy, 1990; Shaw & Winslow, 1997; Sudermann & Jaffe, 1997). Similarly, other research suggested that experiencing or witnessing abuse in childhood was predictive of later antisocial behaviour by victims (e.g., Burgess, Hartman, & McCormack, 1987; Dutton & Hart, 1992; Fagan & Wexler, 1987; Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Lewis, Feldman, & Barrengos, 1985; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Luntz & Widom, 1994; Maxfield & Widom, 1996; Sudermann & Jaffe, 1997; Widom, 1989a, 1989b, 1991). Further, antisocial personality disorder has been highly correlated with the propensity to drop out of school (e.g., Robins, Tipp, & Przybeck, 1991). Clearly, the weight of the evidence emphasizes that individuals who have experienced or witnessed abuse in childhood may be at higher risk for aggressive or violent behaviour in later life.

Moreover, a sizeable body of evidence has also affirmed the connection between childhood sexual abuse and later adolescent- or adult-sex-offender status (e.g., Bagley &

Shewchuk-Dunn, 1991; Becker, Kaplan, Tenke, & Tartaglini, 1991; Becker & Stein, 1991; Benoit & Kennedy, 1992; Green & Kaplan, 1994; McCormack, Rokous, Hazelwood, & Burgess, 1992; Rowe, 1988; Stermac & Mathews, 1987; Stops & Mays, 1991; Worling, 1995). The literature has also reported a negative relationship between sexual abuse and academic achievement (e.g., Einbender & Friedrich, 1989; Tong, Oates, & McDowell, 1987; Trickett, McBride-Chang, & Putnam, 1994). On the topic of childhood sexual abuse, the research literature generally supported the notion that the majority of investigations involved female victims (e.g., Erickson, Walbek, & Seely, 1988; Philp, 2001; Philp, 2001; Pierce & Pierce, 1985; Thomlison, Stephens, Cunes, Grinnell, & Krysik, 1991; Trickett et al., 1994). Several scholars reported that children who witness or encounter abuse may be at a higher risk for school failure, poor academic performance, disciplinary problems, and early school leaving (e.g., Eckenrode, Laird, ~~&~~ Doris, 1993; Hurley & Jaffe, 1990; Oakland, 1992; Rogosch & Cicchetti, 1994; Sudermann & Jaffe, 1997; Tindall, 1989; Trickett et al., 1994; Widom, 1997).

In summary, children who either experience or witness abuse later face a greater likelihood of increased negative and problematic behaviour when they approach adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Farrington, 1991; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Oates, Forrest, & Peacock, 1985; Reid, Kavanagh, & Baldwin, 1987; Salzinger, Feldman, Hammer, & Rosario, 1993; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Wood-Shuman & Cone, 1986).

Family Influences

The data also indicate that the overwhelming majority of participants had experienced several negative family influences. Parental rejection, family conflict, marital discord, inadequate supervision, inconsistent discipline and parental substance abuse are all risk factors associated with dropping out of school. Indeed, the literature reported a relationship between poor parenting practices and delinquency (e.g., Patterson, 1995, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1994; Snyder & Patterson, 1995).

The respondents and their files provided disheartening testimony of parental rejection. Slightly more than one-half of the participants had been rejected by a parent or guardian. The 7 participants who had experienced parental rejection were also those with a history of childhood abuse. Some researchers have shown that deficits in parental bonding and attachment may result in problematic childhood behaviour (e.g., Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1988; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern, & Repacholi, 1993; Renken, Egeland, Marvinney, Mangelsdorf, & Sroufe, 1989; Shaw & Vondra, 1995). Other scholars have shown that a lack of parental bonding or rejection may increase the risk of classroom-behaviour problems (e.g., Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985; Magid & McKelvey, 1988; Pianta, Erickson, Wagner, Kreutzer, & Egeland, 1990), adolescent antisocial behaviour (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Coie, Underwood, & Lochman, 1991; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Saner & Ellickson, 1996), and substance-abuse problems in later life (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Hundleby & Mercer, 1987; Selnow, 1987). The empirical findings of these studies convincingly supported the notion that disturbed family relationships in childhood have long-term implications for the individual and society alike. Additionally, 10 participants had experienced some type of family conflict before incarceration. Generally, the literature demonstrated that family conflict and delinquency may be related (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, Ledger, & West, 1985; Farrington et al., 1986; Hawkins, Catalano, & Brewer, 1995; Loeber & Farrington, 1998). Despite the small subset of the young offender population involved, the findings of the present study support the above results. Furthermore, school dropouts are more likely than graduates to have come from environments where family problems are more prevalent (e.g., Oakland, 1992).

Closely connected to family conflict is marital discord. As a construct or variable, "marital discord" refers to "high levels of hostility expressed between parents during a marital interaction." (Shaw & Winslow, 1997, p. 153). A variety of research evidence suggested a link between marital discord and early behaviour problems in children (e.g., Dadds & Powell, 1991; Katz & Gottman, 1993; Quinton, Pickles, Maughan, & Rutter, 1993; Rutter, 1994; Shaw, Emery, & Tuer, 1993; Shaw, Vondra, Hommerding, Keenan, & Dunn, 1994). Further, several studies reported that substantial numbers (i.e., 23% to

80%) of children have witnessed marital violence at one time or another (e.g., Leighton, 1989; Sinclair, 1985). In the present study, 11 of the 12 participants came from families where "marital discord" either had been or continued to be pervasive. As stated earlier (see Chapter 4), 11 participants came from broken homes. Although family structure (i.e., separation, divorce) is linked to delinquency, this study's findings suggest support for the assertions in the literature that delinquency is primarily associated with marital discord (e.g., Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1992; Quinton et al., 1993; Rutter, 1997) and not family structure per se.

In addition, 10 participants in the present study were inadequately supervised by a parent or guardian, and this inadequacy appeared to go hand in hand with inconsistent discipline. For this study, "inadequate parental supervision" was loosely defined as the parent not knowing the youth's whereabouts for prolonged periods. Overall, children from single-parent families tend to receive less overall supervision than children from two-parent families (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Several researchers have postulated that inadequate parental supervision may be a significant factor in delinquent activity (e.g., Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Steinberg, 1986) and leaving school early (e.g., Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Janosz et al., 1997; Rumberger et al., 1990). Indeed, evidence also suggested that inconsistent parental discipline may be associated with delinquent activity (e.g., Henggeler, 1991; Hoffman, 1993; Simons, Conger, & Whitbeck, 1988; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991). In general, the research evidence clearly showed that a permissive parenting style may have several negative effects on both the individual and society.

Within the context of family influences, a final important research finding indicated that 6 participants came from families where parental substance abuse was pervasive. Evidence cited in the literature suggested that both genetics and the family environment may cause substance abuse by adolescents (e.g., Hawkins, Lishner, Catalano, & Howard, 1986; Institute of Medicine, 1994; McDermott, 1984). That is, research showed that parental and adolescent substance abuse were positively related (e.g., Baumrind, 1985; Brook et al., 1990; Goodwin, 1985; McDermott, 1984; Okey & Cusick, 1995). Other studies linked parental substance abuse to low SES and neighbourhood effects (e.g., McLoyd, 1990). Research also showed that parental substance abuse may be a significant factor in child abuse, child neglect, and family destruction (e.g., Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1993).

Neighbourhood and Community

The following information describes the neighbourhood and community characteristics associated with the 12 participants. The thrust of the analysis focuses on five broad categories: (a) household income of neighbourhoods, (b) availability of drugs, (c) availability of firearms, (d) portrayals of violence in the neighbourhood, and (e) known gang activity in neighbourhoods. This study's research on the neighbourhood and community context has focused on two varieties: the individual context, as discussed in Chapter 4, and the social context, as discussed here. This analysis was prompted by Peeples and Loeber (1994), who remarked that "individuals and families are only rarely studied in the context of their neighbourhoods" (p. 143). The data indicate that the average household income in the participants' neighbourhoods ranged from $21,000 to $66,000. (The postal-code data for the participants' last official residence formed the unit of analysis for this investigation.) The weight of the evidence cited in the literature suggested that children from low-income census tracts and socially unstable neighbourhoods may be at higher risks for juvenile crime and other antisocial behaviour (e.g., Apple, 1989; Farrington et al., 1990; Lindström, 1996; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; McDill et al., 1986; McGahey, 1986; Sampson, 1985, 1987; Saner & Ellickson, 1996; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985), low achievement (e.g., Barrett, 1997) and school failure (e.g., Apple, 1989; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Connell et al., 1995; Ensminger et al., 1996; Radwanski, 1987; Stedman et al., 1988). Other research suggested that low-income census tract neighbourhoods and low parental supervision may be related (e.g., Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985).

Participants in the present study were asked if drugs and firearms were easily attainable in their neighbourhoods. Incredibly, all 12 participants reported the easy availability of both. With respect to availability of firearms, several other research-based studies have reported similar findings, especially for youths with incarceration histories (e.g., Callahan & Rivara, 1992; Lizotte, Tesoriero, Thornberry, & Krohn, 1994; Sheley & Wright, 1993). Easy acquisition of firearms and drugs forms a very real threat for the individual and society alike because availability is often associated with antisocial behaviour, including the use of violence and deadly force towards others (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1992; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Potter & Mercy, 1997).

Additionally, three-quarters of the participants came from neighbourhoods characterized by acts of violence, as reported by the media, prison personnel, or the participants themselves. Generally, violent neighbourhoods are highly populated and have high rates of juvenile crime and easy access to drugs and firearms (e.g., Fagan, 1988; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). The present study also reveals a connection between the type of neighbourhood and the number of household moves. Those participants with more than eight household moves were also more likely to have resided in neighbourhoods portrayed as "violent." Finally, 8 participants came from neighbourhoods where known gang activity was widespread. In conclusion, youths from poor, socially unstable, gang-infested, and unsafe neighbourhoods are likely at greater risk than other youths for school failure and delinquent activity.

Individual Characteristics

To achieve a more thorough understanding of the participants' lives, several questions were asked relating to the individual risk pathways to early school leaving and delinquency. The analysis focuses on seven broad domains: (a) traumatic life events, (b) clinical depression, (c) early behaviour problems, (d) rebellious behaviours, (e) suicidal ideation, (f) anger problems, and (g) substance abuse. What follows describes information about these specific risk pathways. Three of the 12 participants had experienced at least one traumatic life event (i.e., the death of a family member or close friend). Consistent with previous research, the literature showed that young people who had experienced a traumatic or stressful life event, such as the death of a close family member, were at higher odds than other young people of dropping out of school (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Cormany, 1987; Oakland, 1992). Similarly, adolescents who had experienced a traumatic life event were more likely than other adolescents to be involved with the youth justice system (e.g., Garrison, 1983; Harris, 1983; Saner & Ellickson, 1996).

The data reveal that when interviewed, 2 participants had been diagnosed with clinical depression, and 2 participants reported that they were extremely homesick. As well, the data show that 2 of the 3 participants who had experienced a traumatic life event or events also had comorbid depressive and antisocial disorders besides substance-abuse problems. For this study, "comorbidity" was defined along lines proposed by Hinshaw and Zupan (1997) as the co-occurrence of two independent disorders that would not usually occur together by chance. Some researchers have shown that psychological problems such as clinical depression may be more widespread among low SES children (e.g., Gibbs, 1986; Myers & King, 1983), while other researchers have documented that clinical depression is common among youths with conduct disorders (e.g., Zoccolillo, 1992). Indeed, a longstanding body of research literature reported that psychological depression is highly correlated with dropout behaviour (e.g., Fine, 1991; Hammack,1986; Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Mann, 1986; Peng & Takai, 1983). As noted directly above, homesickness did not appear to be a problem for most participants. In general, homesickness occurs when individuals recurrently focus on positive aspects of their home lives (e.g., Thurber & Sigman, 1998). Most participants probably did not particularly miss their sometimes stressful and turbulent home environments. Interestingly enough, the data show that the participants who did experience homesickness had very few previous criminal convictions and no previous terms of detention. Further, the 2 participants who had experienced homesickness reported no family-crisis intervention, parental rejection, parental substance abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. Possibly the most conspicuous finding was that these 2 participants had adequate parental supervision and discipline.

Overall, the research evidence noted that early school leavers tended to be more depressed than their non-dropout counterparts (e.g., Bachman et al., 1971; Franklin, 1989). Further, 2 of this study's participants had experienced thoughts of suicide. These data were gathered exclusively from institutional records. Moreover, suicidal ideation has frequently been linked with failure to graduate from high school (e.g., Andrews & Lewinsohn, 1992; Eggert, Thompson, Herting, & Nicholas, 1994; Lewinsohn, Rohde, & Seeley, 1993; Lewis, Johnson, Cohen, Garcia, & Velez, 1988b; Thompson, Moody, & Eggert, 1994). A large number of empirical studies also connected suicidal ideation to violence towards others (e.g., Apter et al., 1991; Botsis, Plutchik, Kotler, & van Praag, 1995; Garrison, McKeown, Valois, & Vincent, 1993; Greenwald, Reznikoff, & Plutchik, 1994) and loss of a parent through either separation, divorce, abandonment, or death (e.g., Berman, 1986; Tomlinson-Keasey, Warren, & Elliott, 1986).

The data also show that 8 of the 12 participants had early behaviour problems in their homes. Several longitudinal studies suggested that for many children, antisocial behaviour problems are stable over time and may continue into later life (e.g., Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Farrington, 1994; Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1992; Huizinga,1995; Krueger, Caspi, Moffitt, White, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; LeBlanc, 1994; Loeber et al., 1995; Stoolmiller, 1994; Tremblay et al., 1992; White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins, & Silva, 1990; Zoccolillo, Pickles, Quinton, & Rutter, 1992), particularly aggressive behaviour problems (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989b; Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1989; Haapasalo & Tremblay, 1994; Stattin & Magnusson, 1989). Other studies affirmed a positive relationship between early behaviour problems and drug use (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Lerner & Vicary, 1984). Still other research revealed a relationship between early behaviour problems and early school leaving (e.g., Cage, 1984; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989a; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992).

The data revealed that 11 participants had displayed rebellious and defiant behaviour in their adolescent years. Past research revealed that rebellious behaviour in childhood has been positively related to adolescent delinquent behaviour (e.g., Hawkins, Catalano, Loeber & LeBlanc, 1990; Lytton, 1990; Miller, 1992). Further, most participants in the present study had anger-management problems. Specifically, five-sixths of the participants reported having problems controlling their tempers, especially in confrontational situations.

As did Okey and Cusick (1995) and Hartnagel and Krahn (1989), this study found that its respondent group of dropouts had substance-abuse problems. Further, in a study of more than 1,000 adult male offenders from the United States, Bell et al. (1984) found that a statistically significant number of inmates reported having childhood drug and alcohol problems. Specifically, this study's research findings indicated that two-thirds of the participants reported a history of substance abuse. Moreover, all 12 participants reported some experimentation with or occasional use of both alcohol and illicit drugs. In general, research suggested that youths who engage in such practices do so because of rebellious and non-conforming attitudes (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1986; Segal, Huba, & Singer, 1980). An older study carried out by Stroup and Robins (1972) submitted that teenage drinking differentiated those who had quit school from those who had graduated from Grade 12. More recently, in a retrospective study of 162 Edmonton high school dropouts, Hartnagel and Krahn (1989) found that respectively, 64% and 38% of the respondents reported weekly alcohol and marijuana consumption. Subsequent research has also noted that teenage dropouts were more likely than their non-dropout counterparts to consume drugs and alcohol (e.g., Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Chavez et al., 1989; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Wichstrom, 1998).

Other studies have linked adolescent substance abuse to low SES and neighbourhood effects (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Ontario Ministry of Health, 1992). The consequences of drug abuse are enormous, both individually and societally. Individual costs of substance abuse may include decreased cognitive functioning, academic achievement, and motivation (e.g., Block, Farnham, Braverman, & Noyes, 1990; Garnier et al.,1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Nathan, 1990; Windle & Blane, 1989). Other harmful effects of substance abuse are increased occurrences of mood disorders and the possible risk of early death (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1992; McWhirter et al., 1993), particularly from suicide (e.g., Greenwald et al., 1994; Newcomb & Bentler, 1988). Research similarly indicated that adolescent substance abusers are more likely than other adolescents to be homeless (e.g., Windle, 1989), involved with the youth justice system (e.g., Saner & Ellickson, 1996; Raychaba, 1989; Uihlein, 1994), truant from school (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1992), and dropouts (e.g., Friedman, Glickman, & Utada, 1985; Garnier et al., 1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Tidwell, 1988). Social problems related to substance abuse may include higher rates of juvenile crime (e.g., Barrett, Simpson, & Lehman, 1988; Hawkins et al., 1992) increased health-care costs, as well as addiction-service costs (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1992) and other social pathologies.

Manger, Hawkins, Haggerty, and Catalano (1992) carried out an extensive review of the literature and found that early antisocial behaviour, academic failure, a family history of alcoholism, family-management problems, little commitment to school, rebelliousness, friends who use drugs, favourable attitudes towards drugs, early use of drugs, and availability of drugs were all risk factors associated with adolescent substance abuse. The findings from the present study support those of the literature review. Apparently, as the number of risk factors increases, so does the likelihood of dropping out of school.

Companions

An investigation of peer relationships also helps to explain the phenomenon of early school leaving. The following analysis provides specific information about the participants' peer-group affiliations. The analysis focuses on six broad categories: (a) criminal records, (b) friends beyond the participants' own age range, (c) organized crime or gang involvement, (d), how easily the participants are influenced by friends, (e) school dropouts, and (f) substance abuse. These data were derived from institutional reports and interview conversations with the participants.

The data reveal that all 12 participants reported having deviant peer-group affiliations. When the participants were asked in an open-ended way if their companions had criminal records, a general pattern emerged. A notable outcome to this question was that all participants reported, "Yes," the range being from "some" friends to "90%." As would be expected, a wide range of antisocial behaviours existed within these extremes, some behaviours being quite minor, others being extremely serious. In general, early school leavers are more likely than other youths to associate with delinquent companions (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989a; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997; Stedman et al., 1988; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Moreover, a substantial body of research revealed that exposure to deviant peer groups may be associated with delinquent or later criminal behaviour (e.g., Agnew, 1991; Brook & Cohen, 1992; Chavez et al., 1994; Elliot et al., 1985; Elliot & Voss, 1974; Emler, Reicher, & Ross, 1987; Keenan, Loeber, Zhang, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1995; Kercher, 1988; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; Pabon, Rodriguez, & Gurin, 1992; Paternoster & Mazerolle, 1994; Simons et al., 1991; Steinberg, 1986). One-third of the participants in the present study associated with companions at least four years beyond their age range, and half of the participants had companions involved in organized crime or gangs. An extremely strong relationship between gang involvement and delinquency has been reported in the literature (e.g., Loeber & Farrington, 1998; McWhirter et al., 1993; Wilson & Howell, 1995). Other studies affirmed a positive relationship between gang involvement and early school leaving (e.g., Janosz et al., 1997).

Participants in the present study were asked if they were easily influenced by their companions. As anticipated, peer pressure played an important role in the participants' lives. Moreover, all 12 participants reported being easily influenced by their companions. These findings are not surprising given that at-risk youths, especially young offenders, are more inclined than other youths to be open to peer influences (e.g., Giordano et al., 1986; Leaseberg et al., 1990). Finally, the literature noted that youths from single-parent households, especially when female-headed, were more prone than their two-parent counterparts to negative peer influences (e.g., Dornbusch et al. 1985; Steinberg, 1987).

The interview data revealed that 11 participants had friends who had dropped out of school. Further, 2 of this study's participants reported that all their friends were dropouts. In general, dropouts or potential dropouts tend to associate with companions who are also early school leavers. Several researchers provided evidence for this assertion (e.g., Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Cairns et al., 1989; Claes & Simard, 1992; Eckstrom et al., 1986; Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Finan, 1991; Gilbert et al., 1993; Rumberger, 1983; Spain & Sharp, 1990). A final important research finding indicated that 11 participants reported substance abuse among their friends. An extensive and longstanding body of literature has consistently revealed the relationship between adolescent drug use and peer drug use (e.g., Brook & Cohen, 1992; Foster, 1984; Hawkins et al., 1992; Hirschi, 1969; Wilson & Howell, 1995; Winfree, Theis, & Griffith, 1984). Furthermore, research has shown peer drug use to be one of the strongest antecedents to adolescence drug use (Bankston, 1995; Hunter, Vizelberg, & Berenson, 1991; Hawkins, Lishner, & Catalana, 1985; Needle et al., 1986; Walter, Vaughan, & Cohall, 1993). To what extent school failure in this cohort is related to peer pressure is uncertain. However, previous research has strongly associated the two factors (e.g., Barnes & Welte, 1986; Brook et al., 1990; Kandel & Andrews, 1987).

Analysis and Discussion of Educational Perspectives

In Chapter 6, the participants' life stories were presented with an emphasis on their educational backgrounds. A broad range of findings was derived from the data obtained through the open-ended interview questions and the documentary data. This section of Chapter 7 identifies and discusses common themes in the individual cases. To provide a framework for analysis, six key issues are addressed: (a) social climate: student-staff rapport; (b) attitudinal factors; (c) number of schools attended and suspensions; (d) cognitive ability; (e) school-behaviour problems; and (f) employment, finances, credits, and future plans. The discussion includes literature from other relevant theoretical and empirical studies, some of which have been cited earlier. When practical, the findings of the present study are compared with data from national studies.

Social Climate: Student-Staff Rapport

The following provides specific information concerning the participants' self-reported perceptions of school staff. These data were derived solely from interview conversations. The main objective of this line of questioning was to identify those participants with ongoing difficulties interacting with school staff. The participants were asked several questions relating to their degree of satisfaction with teachers and school administrators, and six domains were analyzed: (a) rapport with elementary school teachers, (b) rapport with elementary school vice-principals, (c) rapport with elementary school principals, (d) rapport with high school teachers, (e) rapport with high school vice-principals, and (f) rapport with high school principals. This analysis was prompted by Rumberger (1987), who suggested that "little research has been given to the influences of schools themselves--their organization, leadership, teachers--on students' decisions to drop out" (p. 110). However, Tanner and his colleagues (1995) cautiously pointed out that "This shift in attention--away from dropouts, towards the institutions they have rejected--is probably useful, so long as the lessons of previous research are not lost" (p. 20).

The consensus in the literature is extremely clear: school-related reasons for dropping out are most frequently cited by early school leavers. For example, an older study analyzing U.S. national longitudinal data affirmed that 44% of the dropouts reported school-related reasons for their decision to quit (Rumberger, 1983). A recent Canadian study using national data noted that dropouts were more likely than non-dropouts to have had negative school experiences (Sunter, 1993). Many other empirical studies (e.g., Barber & McClellan, 1987; Bearden et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gilbert et al., 1993; Karp, 1988; Pittman, 1986; Radwanski, 1987; Strother, 1986; Tidwell, 1988) have reported similar findings. Specifically, the literature suggested that students experiencing difficulties at school were more inclined than other students to cite teachers and administrators as areas of concern. For instance, Jordan et al. (1996), drawing on American data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (1988), found that 34% of the dropout respondents indicated that they just "couldn't get along with teachers" (p. 70). Many other studies (e.g., Edmonton Public School Board, 1996; Farrell, 1990; Fine, 1986; Gilbert et al., 1993; Jordan et al., 1996; Karp, 1988; Murdock, 1999; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Sullivan, 1988; Tanner et al., 1995; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Wittenberg, 1988) have reported similar findings. Obviously, a negative orientation towards the school environment or poor relations with educators may increase a student's propensity to drop out.

The cross-case analysis of Chapter 6 showed that 11 of the 12 participants described positive relationships with their elementary school teachers. Students who perceive their teachers positively are more inclined than other students to be motivated in the classroom (e.g., Eccles et al., 1993; Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Wentzel, 1997), to perform better academically (e.g., Babad, 1996; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991; Wigfield & Harold, 1992), and to incur fewer school-adjustment problems (e.g., Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). The interview data also reveal that the overwhelming majority of participants had experienced positive relationships with elementary school administrators. These findings suggest that the respondent group may have been highly satisfied with elementary school personnel. The NLSCY (1996) study supported this study's findings, concluding that 86.8% of Canadian children either "almost always" or "often" looked forward to elementary school (Ross et al., 1996b). Connolly, Hatchette, and McMaster (1998) also supported this view, contending that "the late elementary school years are, by and large, a positive experience for these youth" (p. 26).

A similar pattern was not found in the participants' descriptions of the high school environment. The data reveal that the respondent group viewed high school staff, especially administrators, less favourably and also experienced academic achievement problems. These findings are not surprising given that the overwhelming majority of participants had dropped out by the end of Grade 10. Echoing these findings, Connolly, Hatchette, and McMaster (1999) noted that "From the perspective of developmental contextualism, it was anticipated that pubertal maturation would have deleterious effects on children's adjustment and would alter the relationships between school attitudes and school achievement comment" (p. 24). The literature also noted that the impact of the transition from elementary to high school can, of course, often be difficult and stressful, especially for poor children (e.g., Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987), thus leading to motivational problems (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993) and early school leaving (Lichtenstein, 1993; Rumberger, 1995; Spain & Sharpe, 1990). In spite of the generally less favourable response to high school staff, data show that 9 participants, or 75% of the respondents, reported positive associations with high school teachers. The SLS (1991) study showed that 83% of male dropouts reported no problems getting along with teachers, compared with 98% of the graduates.

Data in the present study show that 5 of the 12 participants reported positive relations with high school vice-principals. This response is surprising given that vice-principals are often the major disciplinarians within the school environment. A final research finding shows that 4 participants reported positive relations with high school principals. However, one-third of the respondents expressed no opinion about their high school principals, probably because the participants had little contact with these administrators. Altenbaugh, Engel, and Martin (1995) supported these findings, noting that students in their study "did not even know the name of the school principal . . . . Those who remembered their last building principal were unable to make any evaluative comment" (p. 79). A final comment on this analysis was made by Lawton, Leithwood, Batcher, Donaldson, and Stewart (1988), who, in summing up the research on effective administrators, concluded that they "were associated with more effective policies and better school community relations, but, overall, they seemed to have little or no influence on dropout rates" (p. viii).

In summary, the data show that just over three-quarters of the respondent group recounted positive relationships with school staff, despite reports of negative school experiences. However, the data also reveal that participants were less likely to be satisfied with their secondary than their elementary school relationships. Moreover, several research-based studies corroborated this finding (e.g., LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Radwanski, 1987; Tanner et al., 1995).

Attitudinal Factors Towards The High School Environment

The self-reported attitudinal factors towards the high school environment also help to explain the disturbing phenomenon of early school leaving. Again, these data were derived solely from interview conversations with the respondent group. Numerous questions were asked which attempted to survey the participants' general feelings towards school. The following provides information concerning the extent and nature of several attitudinal factors. The analysis focuses on five broad categories including (a) feeling of alienation, (b) feeling of boredom, (c) friends at school, and (d) participation in extracurricular activities.

Several researchers have affirmed the connection between alienation and dropping out of school (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fine, 1986, Finn, 1989; Jordan et al., 1996; Karp, 1988; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Quay & Allen, 1982; Radwanski, 1987; Sullivan, 1988; Tidwell, 1988; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). However, contrary to expectation, the findings of the present study revealed that only 3 of the 12 participants had experienced such feelings. For this study, "alienation" was loosely defined as noninvolvement or nonattachment to the school, particularly during the transition period from elementary to secondary school. Similarly, a well-established connection exists between school boredom and early departure (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Edmonton Public School Board, 1996; Radwanski, 1987; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Sunter, 1993; Tanner et al., 1995; Tidwell, 1988). Replicating the results of the studies mentioned directly above, the present study found that three-quarters of the respondents described high school as "boring." Further, when asked why they found school boring, the participant' consensus was that school had little relevance to their lives or present situations.

Interview data reveal that all 12 participants had strong commitments to friends while attending high school. However, the pattern reported in the present study was not found in the empirical literature. Past research suggested that early school leavers were more inclined than their non-dropout counterparts to have fewer friends (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Kaufman, McMillen, & Bradby, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1987). Using national data from the NLSCY (1995) study, Ross et al. (1996b) reported that, on average, roughly one-half of Canadian children had two or three good friends while approximately one-third had four or five good friends. Generally, this present study's findings agree with the overall national pattern in Canada. On the topic of friends, other research empirically supported the notion that early school leavers were more likely to select companions similar to themselves (e.g., Brown, 1990; Epstein, 1983). Consistent with the literature, the participants in this study did in fact associate with companions who were also dropouts. At least for students like the participants in this study, the quality as opposed to the quantity of friends may be a better predictor of who leaves school early.

A final research finding worth noting showed that two-thirds of the respondent group had not participated in extracurricular activities while attending high school. For several participants, involvement in social activities such as athletic teams, clubs, and various other pursuits was not part of their daily schedules. Generally, the research evidence suggested support for the literature's assertions that lack of participation in extracurricular activities, especially athletics, considerably increases a student's likelihood of both dropping out of school (e.g., Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1989; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Gilbert et al., 1993; Janosz et al., 1997; Kelly, 1993; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995; Orr, 1987; Pittman, 1991; Radwanski, 1987; Wolman, Bruininks, & Thurlow, 1989; Zill, 1995) and getting into trouble (e.g., Landers & Landers, 1978; Zill, 1995). Other studies have submitted that extracurricular participation rates may be negatively affected by part-time employment (e.g., Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; King, 1986; King et al., 1988; Sunter, 1993). This, in turn, may lead to disengagement from school. The findings from the present study support those of the literature cited.

Number of Schools Attended and Suspensions

The following analysis provides specific information concerning the participants' attendance and suspension patterns. The analysis focuses on six broad categories: (a) elementary schools attended, (b) secondary schools attended, (c) elementary schools suspensions, (d) secondary schools suspensions, (e) reason for leaving school, and (f) attendance problems at high school. The data for this investigation were derived from both interview conversations with the participants and a short follow-up questionnaire. As noted in Chapter 5, several participants were highly mobile, had little stability in their lives, and experienced several household moves. This pattern was replicated within the school setting. The findings showed that the participants attended an average of approximately five or six (mean = 5.6) elementary and three or four (mean = 3.6) secondary schools. Moreover, some evidence also pointed to a positive relationship between school mobility and dropping out (e.g., Alspaugh, 1999; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Ekstrom et al.,1986; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Worrell, 1997). In contrast, Canadian census data for 1986 revealed that approximately two-thirds of young adults had attended the same school for at least five years (Jansen & Haddad, 1994).

Being suspended from school is another variable in the dropout equation. Several researchers have reported that suspensions from high school were associated with dropping out (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Eckstrom et al., 1986; French & Nellhaus, 1989; Jordan et al., 1996; Spain & Sharp, 1990). The data in this present study reveal that 10 of the 12 participants reported at least one elementary school suspension, the range for the respondent group being from 0 to 25 or more. As might be expected, most of the participants also experienced secondary school suspensions, the range being from 0 to 20 or more. When the respondents were asked in an open-ended way if they had attendance problems at high school, a general pattern emerged. A notable outcome to this question was that all participants reported, "Yes." As expected, the data show a wide range of responses. For example, some participants skipped school only periodically while other participants skipped daily. Moreover, an extensive and longstanding body of literature has consistently cited the relationship between truancy and early school leaving (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Cervantes, 1965; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Gilbert et al., 1993; Hirschi, 1969; Lawton et al., 1988; Rumberger et al., 1990; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Winfree; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). More recently, Tanner et al. (1995) reported in their study of 168 early school leavers that over one-half had skipped class before dropping out.

The following data are organized into two nominal level categories: expelled from high school and dropped out of high school. Participants were asked directly if they had either dropped out or been expelled from school. Notably, one-third of the participants had been expelled. Interestingly, the 4 participants who had been expelled from school also had suffered emotional and physical abuse as children. In addition, they had histories of parental rejection and came from neighbourhoods where known gang activity was widespread. Not surprisingly, a solid body of research evidence suggested a strong connection between school expulsion and dropping out (e.g., Dryfoos, 1990; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Jordan et al., 1996; Orr, 1987; Williams, 1985; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The data also reveal that the remaining 8 participants reported that they had dropped out of high school. Based on data from provincial and national studies, just under 18% of young Canadians drop out of school annually (e.g., Alberta Advanced Education Career & Development, 1993; Durksen, 1994; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; SLF, 1995; SLS, 1991). Obviously, the participants of the present study differed noticeably from the general profile of 16-to-18-year-olds in Canada.

Cognitive Ability

The following provides specific information concerning the participants' cognitive abilities and academic achievement potential. The analysis focuses on six broad domains including (a) remedial programs attended, (b) learning disabilities, (c) problems keeping up at school, (d) grades failed in elementary school, (e) reading grade level, and (f) level of instruction at high school. These data were derived from interview conversations with the participants, institutional documents, and school records.

Within the context of the school environment, one-half of the participants attended remedial programs in the past. For this study, a "remedial program" was defined as "any modified instructional approach for students who have physical, intellectual or behavioural problems that limit their ability to do school work" (Lipps & Frank, 1997, p. 45). In a sample of 651 Wisconsin students, Barrington and Hendricks (1989) found a strong association between special education referrals in elementary school and prematurely leaving high school. Results indicated that 51% of the dropouts had been referred to special education services, as compared to 30% of the graduates. Findings also pointed to a link between remedial education referrals and preschool parental interaction (e.g., Erickson, et al., 1985; Pianta et al., 1990). Based on data from the NLSCY (1995) study, one in ten Canadian children received some form of remedial education during the 1994-95 school year. Disaggregating the NLSCY (1995) data, Lipps and Frank (1997) noted that one-half of the children had been placed in remedial programs because of learning disabilities, while another one-quarter were there because of behavioural problems.

Participants in this study were also asked if they were aware of any personal learning disabilities. Notably, one-half of the participants reported, "Yes." Some research evidence suggested support for the literature's assertions that students who have learning disabilities are more likely than other students to quit school (e.g., Will, 1986; Zabel & Zabel, 1996). Furthermore, IQ testing showed that, on the whole, the respondent group was of "average" intelligence. However, another pattern also revealed that most participants had exceptionally low grades, especially in their last year of high school. The findings of the present study correspond to a study completed almost 30 years ago (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971). The importance of exploring academic performance was highlighted by Gilbert et al. (1993), who remarked that "academic performance is a key variable in the school leaving process" (p. 35). Supporting this position, Wagenaar (1987) suggested that academic performance is closely linked to early school leaving. Further, Dornbusch et al. (1987) reported a connection between low school grades and a permissive parenting style, while Ekstrom et al. (1986) noted the relationship between low grades and single-parent status. Indeed, a relationship between parental educational involvement and student achievement has been reported in the literature (e.g., Fehrmann et al., 1987; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

Similarly, other research suggested a connection between parental educational involvement and dropping out (Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Brennan & Anderson, 1990; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1988; Rumberger et al., 1990). As expected, many researchers provided ample evidence to illustrate the relationship between low academic performance, as indicated by low test scores and grades, and early school leaving (e.g., Alexander et al., 1985; Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Frase, 1989; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gun, & Morgan, 1987; Garnier et al., 1997; Greenwood et al., 1992; Jordan et al., 1996; Karp, 1988; Kaufman et al., 1992; Lawton et al., 1988; Natriello, 1987; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger et al., 1990; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Worrell, 1997).

Participants in the present study were also asked if they had experienced problems keeping up at either elementary or high school. One-half of the participants recalled a variety of problems, and several had repeated or "flunked," as failing is pejoratively called, one or more grades during elementary school. In the present study, "grade retention" simply means nonpromotion to the next grade for any reason. Studies addressing the issue of retention empirically supported the assumption that, in general, the intervention is considered academically harmful and ineffective for many students (e.g., Grisson & Shepard, 1989; Jimerson et al., 1997; Shepard, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1989, 1990), particularly in the upper grades (e.g., Kaufman & Bradby, 1992). For example, in an older study, Mann (1986) noted that "being retained one grade increases the risk of dropping out by 40-50 percent, two grades by 90 percent (p. 308). More recently, Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) also found that grade retention was highly correlated with the propensity to leave school early. Several other studies suggested support for the literature's assertions that children who were older than their peers, because of grade retention, were more likely to leave school early (e.g., Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Cairns et al., 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Hamilton, 1986; Hammack, 1986; Hess & Lauber, 1985; Janosz et al., 1997; Kaufman et al., 1992; Radwanski, 1987; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Schulz, Toles, Rice, Brauer, & Harvey, 1986; Simmer & Barnes, 1991; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). However, research is less clear on the underlying causal factors. For example, one report asked, "Did being retained in a grade or being overage increase the likelihood of such students dropping out or were these students who would have been more likely to drop out even if they had not been retained?" (NCES, 1996, p. 3). Another body of research literature demonstrated that failing a grade in elementary school is likely to lower the odds of attending a postsecondary institution. For example, Butlin (1999), relying on the NLSCY (1996) data set, reported that only 11% of high school graduates who had failed a grade in elementary school attended university compared to 46% of those students who had passed all grades.

Interview data also reveal that most of the participants who repeated a grade did so in their later elementary school years. These findings are in sharp contrast to the NLSCY (1996) study, which noted that children who had repeated a grade in the earlier elementary years (i.e., Grades 1 to 3) had the highest likelihood of failing (e.g., Lipps & Frank, 1997). Generally, the literature noted that male dropouts were much more likely to have failed a grade in elementary school as compared to their non-dropout counterparts (e.g., Sunter, 1993; Gilbert et al., 1993). Furthermore, while not absolute, the weight of the research evidence suggested support for the literature's assertions that children from low SES backgrounds were more likely than other children to have failed one or more grades (e.g., Dauber et al., 1993; Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce, & Snipper, 1982; Lipps & Frank, 1997).

In the present study, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) as a marker of cognitive pathology showed that reading ability varied considerably among the participants. The reliability and validity of this standardized achievement test have been repeatedly confirmed in theoretical and empirical research literature. Further, this IQ test is routinely used to measure a student's level of mastery in arithmetic and spelling. This present study's data illustrate that, when interviewed, the participants ranged in reading ability from 7.3 to 10.9 (the mean and median reading levels for the respondent group were 8.71 and 8.35, respectively). Several researchers have shown that deficits in reading ability may lead to early school leaving (e.g., Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Bearden et al., 1989; Beck & Muia, 1980; Hahn, 1987; Hess & Lauber, 1985; Schulz et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Further, participants in the present study were asked which two subjects they disliked the most at school. In response, 8 participants reported English, and 7 reported mathematics as their least preferred subjects. This finding supports the work of Radwanski (1987), who noted that "The most problematic subjects for dropouts, by an overwhelming margin, appear to be mathematics and English" (p. 79). A consistent relationship between difficulties in math and English and early school leaving has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Sunter, 1993).

Another investigation showed that the participants ranged from low average to high average on verbal, performance, and full-scale IQ (Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised, WAIS-R) tests. Again, the reliability and validity of this IQ test have been well established in the research literature due to the test's numerous replications. Moreover, Wechsler scales are used extensively to measure the IQ of exceptional populations (e.g., Nagle, 1993) such as young offenders and other at-risk groups. In the research literature, an increased likelihood of leaving school has been linked to substandard test-score results (e.g., Alexander et al., 1976; 1985; Binkley & Hooper, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Gastright & Ahmad, 1988; Walters & Kranzler, 1970). The NLSCY (1996) study reported differences in IQ among children according to the educational attainments of their parents (for educational attainments of the participants' parents, see Chapter 4). The findings suggested that children who had lived with highly-educated parents were more inclined than other children to do better on IQ tests than were children who had resided with parents who were school dropouts (Ross et al., 1996b). Similarly, Duncan et al. (1994) noted the importance of the neighbourhood effect on IQ test scores. Their study revealed that for each 10% increase in the proportion of affluent neighbours, IQ increased by 1.6 points in children. Further replicating these findings, Garnier et al. (1997) stated that children from high SES families performed better on Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) tests when compared to their low SES counterparts. Several other researchers have reported a connection between language and reading development and SES status (e.g., Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; Hart & Risley, 1992; Ninio, 1990; Vibbert & Bornstein, 1989; Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994).

The participants in the present study were also asked about their most recent level of instruction at high school. Overall, "level of instruction" is used to describe the level of difficulty of academic course work. Basic-level courses are designed for personal skills, social understanding, and preparation for employment. General-level courses are designed for entry into non-degree-granting institutions such as community colleges. Advanced-level courses are designed for entry into university (Cornfield et al., 1987). As far as level of instruction, the participants' responses were organized into three nominal level categories: enrolled in the basic program of instruction, enrolled in the general program of instruction, or enrolled in the advanced program of instruction. Three participants said that before dropping out, they had been consigned to the basic level of instruction, 9 participants said they were taking courses at the general level, while no participants reported studying at the advanced level of instruction. Although tracking may have valid educational objectives (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994), the predominant pattern in the research literature is quite clear: students enrolled in the basic and general programs of instruction are far more likely than their advanced counterparts to leave school early (e.g., Denton & Hunter, 1991; Frase, 1989; King et al., 1988; Pallas, 1987; Quirouette et al., 1989; Radwanski, 1987).

School Behaviour Problems

Behavioural disorders among children in Canada are cause for concern. For example, one study reported that just under 17% of Ontario children suffered from some type of behavioural disorder (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1986). The following investigation provides specific information concerning the extent and nature of school behavioural problems for the respondent group. The analysis focuses on six broad categories: (a) early (K to 4) behavioural problems, (b) verbal confrontations with teachers, (c) physical confrontations with teachers, (d) physical confrontations with students, (e) class clowning, and (f) school bullying. These data were derived from interview conversations with the participants, institutional documents, and school reports.

The data show that 7 of the 12 participants had experienced early behaviour problems in school. For this analysis, "early" means the period between kindergarten and Grade 4. As might be expected, 6 of the 7 participants who experienced early behavioural problems in school also experienced early behaviour problems at home (see Chapter 5). Several longitudinal studies suggested that, for many children, early behaviour problems will continue over time (e.g., Farrington et al., 1990; Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1995; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1998; Loeber, 1991; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; McGee, Feehan, Williams, & Anderson, 1992; Moffitt, 1993) and, therefore, into later grades. The research literature also found a relationship between early behaviour problems at school and poor school attachment (e.g., Sampson & Laub, 1993), while other studies noted that children who had early aggressive problems in school had considerably higher odds of dropping out of school than other children (e.g., Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Overall, the research evidence suggested a link between misbehaviour in school and dropping out (e.g., Alpert & Dunham, 1986; Dryfoos, 1990; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Janosz et al., 1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Rumberger et al., 1990; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Ten participants in the present study had a history of verbal confrontations with teachers. In general, the research suggested that students lacking respect for authority figures are more likely than other students to drop out of school (e.g., Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz et al., 1997). In the case of physical confrontations with teachers, this study's results do not parallel those of previously mentioned findings. This study's data show that one-quarter of the participants reported some type of physical confrontation. Findings cited in the literature suggested that children who have physical confrontations with authority figures were more likely than other children to drop out of school (e.g., Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Janosz., 1997; Mensch & Kandel, 1988). Other findings suggested that children with school behaviour problems were more likely to be held back upon completion of the school year (e.g., Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Sandoval, 1984).

Overall, the literature suggested that youths who displayed either or both physical and verbal aggression in the school setting were more inclined than other youths to drop out (e.g., Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Fergusson, & Gariépy, 1989b; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Kaufman et al., 1992). Moreover, the data in Chapter 6 showed that two-thirds of the participants tended to be the "class clowns." Participants were also asked if they perceived themselves as school bullies. In response to this question, one-third of the participants had problems in this area. Besides being aggressive towards their victims, bullies are also often aggressive towards authority figures such as parents and teachers (e.g., Banks, 1997; Olweus, 1996). Similarly, bullying has also been related to delinquency; for example, Olweus (1996) in commenting on his follow-up studies, noted, "Approximately 60% of boys who were characterized as bullies in grades 6 through 9 had been convicted of at least one officially registered crime by the age of 24" (p. 269).

Employment, Finances, High School Credits, and Future Plans

The following analysis describes the 12 participants' work involvement, finances, high school credits, and future plans. These data were derived from interview conversations with the participants, institutional and school records. The data reveal that 7 of the 12 participants reported working for pay while attending high school. Dissaggregating the data reveals that 1 participant had worked but "not legally," another participant had worked full-time, while 5 participants reported legal part-time employment. For this study, "part-time" employment meant working 30 hours or less per week (Lowe & Krahn, 1992). The findings reported above are not surprising, given that one-half to two-thirds of all Canadian students are employed at one time or another during their high-school years (e.g., Bowlby & Jennings, 1999; Cohen, 1989; Gilbert, 1993; Gilbert et al., 1993; Lawton, 1994; Lowe & Krahn, 1992; Sunter, 1992, 1993). Many other studies also suggested that employment during high school was the norm rather than the exception (e.g., D'Amico, 1984; King et al., 1988; MacArthur et al., 1989; Manning, 1990; Steinberg, Bradford, Cider, Kaczmarek, & Lazzaro, 1988; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991; Tanner & Krahn, 1991).

The question remains: does employment during high school increase the likelihood of diminished academic performance and early withdrawal? Part of the problem in answering this question stems from contradictory empirical findings. On the one hand, a variety of empirical studies reported the favourable effects of youth employment during high school (e.g., Barton, 1989; Carr et al., 1996; D'Amico, 1984; Green, 1990; Holland & Andre, 1987; Hotchkiss, 1986; Rumberger & Daymont, 1984). On the other hand, additional empirical studies have noted the harmful effects of youth employment during high school (e.g., Finch & Mortimer, 1985; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Greenberg & Steinberg, 1986; McNeil, 1984; Meyer, 1987; Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Steinberg, 1982; Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Fegley, & Dornbusch, 1993; Sullivan, 1988). Still other research highlighted the curvilinear relationship between youth employment and hours worked per week (e.g., Barro, 1984; D'Amico, 1984; Greenberger, 1983; King et al., 1988; Lillydahl, 1990; McNeal, 1995; Schill, McCartin, & Meyer, 1985; Sunter, 1993).

Although youth employment during school may be associated with several negative effects, the research evidence suggested support for the literature's assertions that those adverse effects tend to depend primarily upon the number of hours worked and not the employment itself (e.g., Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Radwanski, 1987; Schill et al., 1985). Collectively, research robustly supported the contention that working more than fifteen hours per week was cause for great concern (e.g., Barro & Kolstad, 1987; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mann, 1986; Meyer, 1987; Orr, 1987; Radwanski, 1987; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991; Stern et al., 1990; Sunter, 1993). In particular, a strong relationship has been reported between excessive hours worked and early school leaving (e.g., Barro, 1984; D'Amico, 1984; Ekstom et al., 1987; Gilbert, 1993; Gilbert et al., 1993; King et al., 1988; Marsh, 1991; McNeal, 1997b; Reubens, 1985, cited in Radwanski, 1987; Sunter, 1993). In summary, while a full debate of the effects of employment during school is beyond the scope of this discussion (for an extensive review of the literature, see Lawton, 1994), the weight of the emerging research evidence clearly supports the contention that working during the high school years is considered harmful, especially for those students working more than fifteen hours per week.

To find out if money played a part in the participants' decision to drop out of school, several open-ended questions were asked relating to this subject. Overall, 5 participants noted that economic reasons had very little or no effect on their decisions to quit school. In contrast, 7 participants reported that financial reasons played a notable role in their decisions to drop out. Not unexpectedly, 5 of these 7 participants also had a history of school employment. Several research-based studies have partially replicated these findings, showing that financial problems are indeed associated with early school leaving. For example, Rumberger (1987) noted that roughly 20% of the dropout sample had cited economic reasons for leaving school. Several other studies (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Spain & Sharp, 1990; Tanner et al., 1995) have reported similar findings.

What follows presents a summary of the number of high school credits accumulated by the participants. These data include credits obtained from both high school and correctional settings. The data concerning the number of high school credits reveal a wide distribution. Ten participants reported at least two credits, the range of the total cohort being from zero to 21.5. Moreover, obtaining as many school credits as possible while in custody figured prominently into the short-term plans of most participants. (In most provinces, students need to earn a minimum of 30 credits in order to graduate from high school). Predictably, research evidence also pointed to a relationship between the number of academic credits accumulated and employment during high school (e.g., Marsh, 1991).

The future educational plans of the respondent group were coded into three nominal level categories: graduation from high school, graduation from college, and graduation from university. One of this study's positive aspects was that all 12 participants acknowledged the desire to return to the school. Participants in the present study appeared to realize the economic value of further formal education. Two participants said their plans included graduating from high school, 9 participants said their plans included graduating from community college, while 1 participant said his ultimate goal was to graduate from university. Gilbert (1993) analyzed national data from the School Leavers Survey (SLS, 1991), which interviewed a stratified random sample of nearly 10,000 Canadian high school leavers between the ages of 18 and 20. Of the young adults who were school leavers, 95% planned on either returning to school or obtaining new skills. Moreover, the School Leavers Follow-Up Survey (SLF, 1995) reported that 25% of the dropouts in the SLS (1991) study had graduated from high school by 1995 (Frank, 1996a). Further, of those who had not returned to high school, 12% and 8% received additional training from trade schools or community colleges, respectively (Frank, 1996a; Frank, 1996b). Likewise, Berktold, Geis, and Kaufman's (1998) study using data from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study and its 1994 follow-up study found that 50% of the early school leavers had ultimately completed high school.

Other studies have also noted the "dropback" phenomenon (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Borus & Carpenter, 1983; Coley, 1995; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Kaufman, 1998; Jansen & Haddad, 1994; Jordan et al., 1996; Metzer, 1997; Pallas, 1987; Pawlovich, 1984; Roderick, 1993; Statistics Canada, 1994).

The interview data also shed light on the participants' future vocational plans. Participants were asked several open-ended questions relating to their employment goals. Notably, five-sixths of the respondent group acknowledged definite plans. These findings are contrary to those associated with the criminal paradigm. Brownfield and Sorenson (1993) cited several studies (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969; Reckless, 1967) in which criminals are less goal-oriented. However, this pattern of goal-directed behaviour was generally consistent with the findings of the SLF (1995) study. For example, when the dropouts were asked what they would be doing five years in the future, 84% reported future employment goals (Frank, 1996a). Other studies have reported similar research findings (e.g., Spain & Sharp, 1990). From a different perspective, other literature suggested a connection between lack of vocational goals and early school leaving, especially for criminal males (e.g., Samuelson, Hartnagel, & Krahn, 1996; Tindall, 1988; Williams, 1985). Moreover, one-quarter of this study's participants noted a strong desire to join the Canadian Armed Forces. Interestingly, these participants had no more than a Grade 8 education (see Chapter 4) and, of the cohort, had the lowest number of accumulated high school credits. Significantly, Statistics Canada (1994), in summing up the twin facets of employment and education, pointed out that "Unemployment in 1990 was the lowest among university degree-holders and highest among Canadians with Grade 8 or less" (p. 157).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the findings in relation to the research literature. Rudestam and Newton (2001) noted that the Analysis and Discussion chapter "is an opportunity to move beyond the data and integrate, creatively, the results of your study with existing theory and research" (p. 167). Consistent with Rudestam and

Newton's explication, the results of this study were linked with the research literature to examine the phenomenon of early school leaving. In particular, the 57 subcategories that emerged from the 24 narrative stories formed the basis for the chapter.

CHAPTER 8

OVERVIEW, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of this study on early school leaving and is organized into three sections. The first section reviews the purpose, justification, significance, method, and findings of the study. The second section presents the conclusions relative to the study's three specific research questions. This section also identifies key areas where this study has contributed to the literature on dropouts. The final section of Chapter 8 presents recommendations for practice and further research.

Overview of the Study

Purpose

This study is about 12 male school dropouts who "ended up behind bars." The perceptions of these 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old young offenders were explored to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. The study was guided by the general research question "Why did these incarcerated youths leave school early?"

The following specific research questions are subsumed under the general research question:

1. What demographic and crime-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?
2. What personal and family background factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?
3. What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' "dropping out" of high school?

Justification for the Study

Concerns over the dropout rate have been escalating in Canada and were featured in the Statistics Canada School Leavers Survey (SLS, 1991) and the School Leavers Follow-up Survey (SLF, 1995), commissioned to measure the extent of the dropout problem and to report on factors associated with early school leaving. The findings of these--and other--studies estimated that 15% to 18% of young Canadians drop out of school annually. Earlier research (e.g., The Canadian Press, 1991; Denton & Hunter, 1991; Employment and Immigration, 1990b; Jansen & Haddad, 1994; Radwanski, 1987; Statistics Canada, 1990) suggested that much higher dropout rates exist. Considering these studies, it is appropriate to explore family background, personal, school, and criminal characteristics related to early school leaving.

Further justification for the study was identified in relation to the costs and consequences of early school leaving. The literature noted at least three harmful effects of early school leaving. First, dropouts face an increased probability of reduced economic and employment-related prospects. This increase usually translates into a bleak future of minimum wages and part-time jobs or unemployment. Second, students who leave school early can create enormous social and economic costs for society. Social problems related to school attrition may include higher rates of delinquency, criminal activity, drug abuse, incarceration, and other social pathologies. Third, the individual costs of leaving school early are immeasurable. Failure to achieve a high school diploma or its equivalent may severely limit an individual's chances of success during adulthood. Students who leave school before obtaining their high school diplomas often struggle both financially and emotionally because of reduced employment prospects, delinquency, drug abuse, low self-esteem, and low achievement.

Significance of the Study

This study has both practical and theoretical significance. Understanding the practical reasons for early school leaving is desirable given the present interest by parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, ministries of education, and the public in general. Identifying and understanding early school leaving based primarily on a self-report emic perspective, that is, the young offender's viewpoint, may provide a greater understanding of students' educational needs. As well, understanding reasons for early school leaving can also help to improve teaching and administrative policies and practice.

This study is theoretically significantly for three reasons. First, although much research has been done within the positivist domain, considerably less has been conducted from a naturalistic perspective, that is, from an understanding of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. Given this inadequacy, a fundamental purpose of this study was to address early school leaving by qualitatively probing the dropout-young offender association from several perspectives, including family-background, school, demographic, and criminal characteristics. Second, the literature has suggested that early school leaving should be analyzed from several perspectives by using dissimilar populations. However, very little research based on the emic perspective has addressed the issue of early school leaving. Although much research has been done on why young students leave school early, sampling designs have been limited to a subset of the population predominantly unconstrained by its environment, despite the high degree of congruency between incarceration and dropout status. Third, considerable research has been conducted into the criminal justice system; however, gaps pertaining to the youth justice system continue to exist. This study tried to redress several shortcomings of earlier studies by drawing on information from interview transcripts, document reviews, and other written evidence.

Method

This study's research design lies within the qualitative spectrum; data were gathered from semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted with purposively selected *in situ* participants, that is, participants incarcerated in a secure-custody detention facility. Kvale (1996) provided the rationale for the method, suggesting that "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" (p. 1). The study employed a multiple case study approach to address the phenomenon of early school leaving. In particular, 12 case studies were developed and analyzed to illuminate the specific research questions noted above. Moreover, the case studies were presented in a narrative format. Holloway (1997) supported the appropriateness of selecting this kind of strategy, noting that "narrative is a powerful medium through which researchers and readers can gain access to the world of participants and share their experiences" (p. 106).

Two factors guided the selection of the sample of young offenders. First, previous research has suggested a high degree of association between criminality and dropping out of school. Second, identification of a suitable dropout population was previously problematic due to the difficulty in locating or tracking these persons after they had quit school (e.g., Barr-Telford & Castonguay, 1995; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Sullivan, 1987; Wyman et al., 1993). Therefore, this study relied on young offenders as a target group, since they represent a large deviant dropout population.

Participants were selected and invited to take part in this study based on their dropout and incarceration status, age, gender, availability and willingness, and ability to speak English. Over a period of three days, 12 participants were approached by the interviewer and briefed about the nature and purpose of the study. All the participants who were contacted agreed to be interviewed. Each participant completed two semi-structured interviews lasting between 90 minutes and 120 minutes each. Although interviewing was the mainstay of data collection, several other information sources were incorporated into the study. Additional data, in the form of correctional reports and school records, were examined throughout the study and were treated like transcripts in that selected data were coded and categorised.

Following the first tape-recorded interview, the unfiltered data were typed verbatim, formatted into a computer database, printed, and read. This process was maintained throughout the analysis. To manage the many pages of interview transcripts, each line of text was sequentially numbered, and question-and-answer sequences were left in paragraph form. Passages quoted in the final report were given a second identification number for increased auditability. The data were organized into thematic sections, all of which corresponded respectively to the study's three specific research questions.

To address the phenomenon under study, each section of text was examined line-by-line, and preliminary constructs were identified. For easy identification, these constructs were colour-coded in the context in which they were typewritten. Well-defined categories about events were identified, and subcategories were grouped together and given conceptual labels. After the data were decontextualized and sorted, relationships and themes emerged from the transcripts. As more data became available, comparisons between case studies were carried out, and subcategories were either modified or deleted. In aggregate, 97 subcategories encompassed and summarized the study's data and were described in relation to the research literature.

Findings

Findings in relation to specific research question 1, "What demographic and crime-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' 'dropping out' of high school?" were presented, summarized and discussed in Chapter 4. The findings showed the respondent group was serving approximately thirteen months secure custody, approximately three times higher than the Canadian national average. Most of the participants were recidivists with lengthy criminal records dating from convictions obtained in their early teens. Slightly more than one-half reported that they came from low-income families, and break-ups between their natural parents were extremely common. Most of the participants reported living independently, and all had either dropped out of or been expelled from school.

Findings in relation to specific research question 2, "What personal and family background factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' 'dropping out' of high school?" were presented in Chapter 5 and theoretically elaborated in section one of Chapter 7. A broad range of findings was derived by asking a series of open-ended questions and by analyzing documents. Several themes surfaced from the individual life-history perspectives in Chapter 5. Approximately two-thirds of the participants had been exposed to some type of child abuse. The respondent group had an average of ten household moves and had attended at least two different detention facilities. Exactly two-thirds of the participants reported a history of family crisis intervention, and just over half identified episodic periods of transiency and homelessness and early independence.

Most participants had experienced negative family influences. Slightly more than half had been rejected by a parent or guardian, and 10 participants had experienced some type of family conflict before incarceration. Most of the participants came from families with prevalent marital discord and little parental guidance. Another important research finding showed that half of the participants came from families where parental substance abuse was pervasive. In the context of neighbourhood and community characteristics, the findings showed that the average household income of the participants' neighbourhoods was relatively low and that firearms and drugs were easily attainable. Further, most of the participants came from neighbourhoods characterized as violent or gang-infested.

In the context of individual characteristics, few participants had experienced depression, suicidal thoughts, or traumatic life events, although the majority had experienced early behaviour problems. Similarly, nearly all the participants had manifested rebellious behaviours and reported having problems controlling their tempers. Further, drug and alcohol use was prevalent among the respondent group of dropouts. Overall, most participants in the study associated with friends of questionable character. The participants reported being easily influenced by their peers and noted that substance abuse and dropout status were common among their friends.

Findings in relation to specific research question 3, "What school-related factors, if any, contributed to the young offenders' 'dropping out' of high school?" were presented in Chapter 6 and theoretically elaborated in section two of Chapter 7. Several themes emerged from the individual educational perspectives and are summarised below. The data revealed that the participants were inclined to be less satisfied with their secondary than with their elementary school relationships. These findings were generally consistent with the research literature.

With respect to alienation and isolation, the general pattern suggested that the participants had experienced few problems in these areas. Conversely, most of the participants recalled varying degrees of boredom at school. The participants' overall consensus was that school had little relevance to their current situation. Further, all the participants reported having friends at school. However, few reported participation in extracurricular activities while attending high school.

In general, this study showed that the participants were highly mobile, had little stability in their lives, and had attended a myriad of educational institutions. Further, the participants had a history of truancy and reported numerous school suspensions. Half of the participants had attended a remedial school program and learning disabilities were prominent. Interestingly, IQ testing showed that, on the whole, the respondent group was of "average" intelligence. Over one-half of the participants had early (K to 4) behaviour problems at school, and most recalled verbal confrontations with teachers.

With respect to work, finances, and future plans, several themes also emerged from the individual educational perspectives. In particular, the findings revealed that just over half of the participants reported episodic employment during high school. To discover if money played a role in the participants' decision to quit school, several questions were asked relating to this theme. Overall, 7 participants believed that financial considerations were involved in their decision to leave school early. Further, participants were asked if they planned on returning to school once they were released from custody. Without hesitation, they all answered, "Yes." Correspondingly, all but 2 participants expressed some degree of commitment to obtaining post-secondary credentials.

Conclusions

The conclusions presented in this section extend the theoretical elaborations, discussions, and summaries presented in Chapters 4 through 7. The conclusions follow the study's major findings and correspond to each of the three specific research questions. Support for the conclusions was derived from interviews with the participants, institutional and school documents, and research literature.

Family Background and Demographic Characteristics

The findings from this study support the notion that children from large families are more likely than other children to leave school early and to develop antisocial behaviour problems. Family size has been seen to have a profound influence on verbal ability (e.g., Willms, 1996), general student achievement (e.g., Hanushek, 1992), and on early school leaving (e.g., Alexander, et al., 1997; Davies, 1994). In general, it has been postulated that large families may harm children's intellectual growth because of economic and parental time constraints (e.g., Hirschi, 1991; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). The data concerning the number of children in the participants' families reveal a wide distribution. The respondent group had, on average, 3.7 siblings. Further analysis showed that the 3 participants who had the greatest number of siblings also had on average the greatest number of criminal convictions.

The proportion of family breakups among the participants' natural parents was considerably higher than it is among the general population. An astonishing 11 of the 12 early school leavers in the present study reported that they came from "broken" homes. Considering that 84.2% of Canadian children live in two-parent families (Ross et al., 1996b), these rates are exceptional. In general, children from single-parent families or children living independently are more likely to leave school early compared to children living in dual-parent families. The interview data from this study clearly support that view. The participants in the present study were also asked about their most recent living arrangements. Just under half of the participants had lived without a parent before incarceration. The results of this study support the conclusion that early independence contributes to students quitting school. Velez (1989) reached the same conclusion, noting that youths who take on adult roles prematurely are, in general, less committed to school. This study's findings also suggest that early independence may be associated with high rates of poverty, criminal activity and drug use, and government subsidies such as student welfare. The document reviews and the interview data support this conclusion.

In general, both parental education and household income were reported to be relatively low for the participants' families. When the participants were interviewed, most of their natural parents had not completed high school. Some evidence in the literature suggested that the children of parents with a low level of education are more apt than other children to leave school early (i.e., Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Radwanski, 1987). Many other research-based studies have also shown a consistent relationship between low parental educational attainment and adolescent school leaving (e.g., Davies, 1994; Gilbert & Orok, 1993; Sunter, 1993; Tanner et al, 1995). Other research suggested a connection between parental educational attainment, particularly maternal educational attainment, and academic outcomes of children (e.g., Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Spencer et al., 1993). This study's findings suggest that parents' educational attainment and youths' dropout status are closely related. These results generally support the conclusion of Radwanski (1987), who noted that "the lower the level, occupational status and level of education of his/her parents, the greater is the statistical risk that any given student will not complete school" (p. 71).

Participants were asked in an open-ended manner to indicate their parents' current employment status. These data were then coded as either blue-collar, white-collar, or welfare. The findings reveal that most parents were employed in blue-collar occupations or sustained by government assistance such as welfare. The participants were also asked to rate their families' income level. The data show that most of the participants were brought up in poor families with relatively low household incomes. Moreover, the findings reveal that only a small portion of the families had obtained financial independence. This conclusion is not surprising given that most of the parents were neither supplemented by a second income nor had a high-school education. Very likely, living in poverty had some affect on poor school performance, early school leaving, and criminal involvement.

All the participants in this study had been referred to a term of secure custody by provincial youth court judges and, in general, the youths represented a risk to either society or themselves. Moreover, several of these youth were identified as chronically violent young offenders, and nearly all had criminal records dating from Phase One convictions. At the time of interviewing, all but a single participant had been convicted of at least one violent crime, and two-thirds had a prior history of detention before their present incarceration. Further analysis showed that the 1 participant who did not have a history of violence lived in the neighbourhood characterised by the highest household income. In general, the interview data support the conclusion that children from low-income neighbourhoods are at higher risk for juvenile crime and other antisocial behaviours. On average, the participants in this study were serving approximately thirteen months of secure custody followed by two months of open custody. These findings suggest extended periods of absence from school. If so, grade retention, early school leaving, and negative peer associations seem likely.

Personal Characteristics

The interview data support the conclusion that the participants in the present study were highly mobile and had little stability in their lives. Most of them had lived in a wide assortment of accommodations and had moved from one parent to another, from one friend to another, besides living with relatives, acquaintances, and strangers. The participants had experienced on average ten household moves and six secure-custody placements. The interview data reveal a connection between the number of household moves and type of neighbourhood. Those participants with more than eight household moves were also more likely to have resided in surroundings portrayed as "violent." The interview data also support the conclusion that residential mobility was affected by divorce, separation, and remarriage. These findings are not surprising given that children from single-parent families are more likely than other children to have moved and changed schools several times (i.e., Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Long, 1992). Moreover, this study's findings suggest that mobility may be linked to school behavioural problems, absenteeism, and academic difficulties, all of which intrinsically affect one's decision to stay in school. As Vail (1996) remarked, teachers "cannot hope to make lasting changes with children who stay for only a month or two before moving on" (p. 22). Rumberger and Larson (1998) further concluded that "student mobility reduces the odds of high school graduation" (p. 30).

The data also reveal that most participants investigated in the present study had a history of family crisis intervention. Placement in a family crisis facility such as a foster or group home had contributed to a lack of continuity in the participants' lives. Three-quarters of the youths had experienced at least one placement with a social service agency. The interview data support the conclusion that adolescents who come into contact with social service agencies typically have more problems than their counterparts who have not had such contact. Abusive histories, disruptive behaviours, substance-abuse problems, learning difficulties, truancy, school failure, and early school leaving were prevalent among the participants.

As well, just over half of the participants had (a) run away from home, (b) lived a transient lifestyle (i.e., they had recurrently wandered from one residence to another or lived on the streets for short or extended periods), (c) been asked to leave home, or (d) been locked out of the home. Although why these participants left home at such a young age is not entirely clear, it may be cautiously concluded that many seem to have been running from sometimes turbulent and stressful home environments. Again the interview and document data support the conclusions that these participants had experienced many problems, including high rates of abuse, poverty, school absenteeism, and failure.

The respondents and their files reported varying accounts regarding child abuse (i.e., abuse before age sixteen), including abuse witnessed, physical and sexual abuse experienced, emotional abuse, and neglect. The documents showed that three-quarters of the participants in the present study had been exposed to some type of child abuse. This finding supports other research evidence that suggests a connection between abuse and subsequent deviant behaviour. Clearly, the weight of the evidence emphasized that individuals who have experienced or witnessed abuse in childhood may be at higher risk for aggressive or violent behaviour in later life. Other research reported that children who witness or encounter abuse may be at a higher risk for school failure, poor academic performance, disciplinary problems, and early school leaving (e.g., Eckenrode et al., 1993; Rogosch & Cicchetti, 1994; Sudermann & Jaffe, 1997; Widom, 1997). The present study on the basis of the document and interview analysis, support those conclusions noted directly above.

The interview data also reinforce the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of participants had experienced several negative family influences such as parental rejection, family conflict and marital discord, inadequate parental supervision, inconsistent parental discipline, and parental substance abuse. In particular, the respondents and their files provided disheartening testimony of parental rejection. Slightly more than one-half of the participants had been rejected by a parent or guardian. Further analysis of the data revealed that these respondents also had a history of childhood abuse. The results support the conclusion that deficits in parental bonding and attachment may result in problematic childhood behaviour, including classroom misbehaviour, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, and early school leaving. This study's findings join a growing body of research literature suggesting that disturbed family relationships have long-term implications for the individual.

Closely connected to disturbed family relationships is marital discord. This study's findings support the conclusion that children from families where marital discord is pervasive may be at a greater risk than other children for early behaviour problems which, in turn, predict dropping out of school. Within the context of family influences, a final important research finding show that half of the participants came from families where parental substance abuse was widespread. Not unexpectedly, two-thirds of these participants also had a history of substance abuse. These results generally support the conclusion of Okey and Cusick (1995), who noted that "drinking, smoking, taking drugs, and running afoul of authority" (p. 263) are behaviours that youths learn from their parents. Several research-based studies have partially replicated these findings, showing that parental and adolescent substance abuse are positively related (e.g., Baumrind, 1985; Brook et al., 1990; Goodwin, 1985).

The data show that the average household income in the participants' neighbourhoods ranged from $21,000 to $66,000. Postal-code data allowed for geographic mapping of participants' families. Further, the interview data support the conclusion that children from low-income census tracts may be at higher risks for juvenile crime, low school achievement, and school failure. Participants in the present study were asked if drugs or firearms were easily attainable in their neighbourhoods. Incredibly, all 12 participants reported the easy availability of both. Several other research-based studies have reported similar findings, especially for youths with incarceration histories (e.g., Lizotte et al., 1994; Sheley & Wright, 1993). Easy acquisition of firearms and drugs forms a very real threat for the individual and society alike because availability is often associated with antisocial behaviour, including the use of violence and deadly force towards others (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1992; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Potter & Mercy, 1997). This study's results support this conclusion. At the time of interviewing, more than half of the participants were serving time for armed robbery, and over 80% had a prior history of weapon use. In conclusion, youths from poor and unsafe neighbourhoods appear to be at greater risk for delinquent activity and school failure than other youths.

The cross-case analysis revealed several individual characteristics that may be associated with early school leaving. In particular, the interview data reveal that most of the participants had experienced early and rebellious behaviour, besides having anger-management problems. Moreover, this study's findings support the conclusions from earlier studies that show behaviour problems, particularly aggressive behaviour, are constant over time.

The interview data reinforce the notion that these dropouts tend to also have deviant peer group affiliations. When the participants were asked in an open-ended way if their companions had criminal records, a general pattern emerged. A notable outcome to this question was that all participants reported in the affirmative, with the range being from "some" friends to "90%." One-third of the participants had associated with companions at least four years outside their age range, and half of the participants had companions involved in organized crime or gangs. This study's findings support the relationship between gang involvement and delinquency, and also the argument that gang involvement is highly correlated with the propensity to leave school early. The interview data also reveal that most of the participants had dropout friends. This study's results support the conclusion that dropouts tend to associate with other dropouts. This study's data also reinforce the conclusion that adolescent drug use and peer drug use are positively related. To what extent school failure in the cohort is related to peer pressure is uncertain. However, previous research has strongly associated the two factors (e.g., Brook et al., 1990; Kandel & Andrews, 1987).

School-Related Characteristics

The consensus in the literature is extremely clear: school-related reasons for dropping out are most frequently cited by early school leavers. A recent Canadian study using national data noted that dropouts were more likely than non-dropouts to have had negative school experiences (Sunter, 1993). Specifically, the literature suggested that students experiencing difficulties at school were more inclined than other students to cite teachers and administrators as areas of concern. In the high school context, the results from this study generally reflect that position. However, within the elementary school setting, the results from this study do not support that viewpoint. This difference suggests that the respondent group may have been highly satisfied with elementary school personnel. The interview data reinforce this conclusion, showing that all but 1 participant described positive relationships with their elementary school teachers. These results give little credence to the notion that the elementary school years were a negative experience for the respondent group. In spite of the participants' generally less favourable response to high school administrators, the data reveal that three-quarters of the participants noted positive associations with teachers.

Many other questions were asked which attempted to survey the participants' general feelings towards school. The open-ended questions focused on four broad topics including alienation, boredom, friends, and extracurricular activities. Participants were asked if they felt alienated or isolated at school. However, contrary to expectations, this study's findings reveal that only 3 of the 12 participants experienced such feelings. Participants were also asked if they felt bored at school. In response to this question, three-quarters of the participants reported boredom with classroom or school routines. This study's results support the conclusion that boredom contributes to students quitting school.

The data reviewed in this study suggest that the participants had strong commitments to friends while attending high school. However, this pattern was not found in the empirical literature. Past research suggested that early school leavers were more inclined than their non-dropout counterparts to have fewer friends (e.g., Cairns et al., 1989; Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Kaufman, McMillen, & Bradby, 1992). The research literature did, however, reinforce the notion that early school leavers were more likely to select companions similar to themselves (e.g., Brown, 1990; Epstein, 1983). The interview data support this conclusion, revealing that the participants were more inclined to associate with both dropout and deviant friends. This study's findings also support the argument that nonparticipation in extracurricular activities may be associated with the propensity to leave school early. Two-thirds of the participants were not involved in social activities such as athletics.

As noted previously, several participants were highly mobile, had little stability in their lives, and had experienced several household moves. This pattern was replicated within the school setting. The findings show that the participants had attended an average of approximately six elementary and four secondary schools. Moreover, the data support the research evidence pointing to a positive relationship between school mobility and dropping out (e.g., Alspaugh, 1999; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Worrell, 1997).

The participants were asked to recall how many times they had been suspended from elementary school. Ten of the 12 participants reported at least one elementary school suspension, the range for the respondent group being from 0 to 25 or more. As might be expected, most of the participants also experienced secondary school suspensions, the range being from 0 to 20 or more. These data reinforce the conclusion that being suspended from high school may be associated with dropping out. When the respondents were asked in an open-ended way if they had attendance problems at high school, a general pattern emerged. A notable outcome to this question was that all participants reported, "Yes." These findings agree with other studies noting the relationship between truancy and early school leaving (e.g., Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Gilbert et al., 1993; Tanner et al., 1995).

Participants were asked directly if they had either dropped out or been expelled from school. Notably, one-third of the participants reported being expelled. Not surprisingly, a solid body of research evidence suggested a strong connection between school expulsion and dropping out (e.g., Dryfoos, 1990; Jordan et al., 1996; Orr, 1987). Obviously, the participants in the present study differed noticeably from the general profile of 16-to-18-year-olds in Canada. Interestingly, the 4 participants who had been expelled from school also had suffered emotional and physical abuse as children. Further analysis showed that these participants also had histories of parental rejection and came from neighbourhoods where known gang activity was prevalent. This finding suggests, but does not conclusively prove, that expelled students can be distinguished from other dropouts based on a host of other family background and personal variables.

Several participants had attended remedial programs and recalled having had personal learning disabilities. Further, participants were asked which two subjects they disliked the most at school. In response, English and mathematics were reported as their least preferred subjects. A consistent relationship between difficulties in these subjects and early school leaving has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1993; Sunter, 1993). Participants in the present study were also asked if they had experienced problems keeping up at either elementary or high school. One-half of the participants recalled a variety of problems, and several had repeated one or more grades during elementary school. Another pattern revealed that most participants had exceptionally low grades, especially in their last year of high school. While low grades in a few courses do not necessarily lead to dropping out, a history of low grades has been highly correlated with the propensity to quit school (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Edmonton Public Schools, 1996; Janosz et al., 1997). Interestingly, IQ testing showed that, on the whole, the respondent group was of "average" intelligence. The interview and document data support the conclusion that although IQ may play a role in the dropout process, other influences may be equally or more important.

Behavioural disorders among children in Canada are cause for concern. The data from this study show that just over one-half of the participants had experienced early behaviour problems in school. These findings support the conclusion that early behaviour problems contribute to students quitting school. The literature also showed that students who quit school were more apt than other students to exhibit disruptive behaviour in class, particularly early aggressive behaviour (e.g., Ensminger et al., 1996; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Within the context of school behaviour problems, most of the participants also had a history of verbal and physical confrontations with teachers and students, respectively. In general, it may be cautiously concluded that youths who display either or both physical and verbal aggression in the school setting are more inclined than other youths to drop out of school. The results from this study generally support the research literature (e.g., Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Kaufman et al., 1992).

The interview data reveal that just over half of the participants reported working for pay while attending high school. These findings are not surprising given that roughly 60% of all Canadian students are employed at one time or another during their high school years (e.g., Bowlby & Jennings, 1999; Lawton, 1994). In particular, several participants reported working more than fifteen hours per week. This study's interview data and the research literature robustly supported the contention that working more than fifteen hours per week may contribute to early school leaving. To find out if money played a part in the participants' decision to drop out of school, several open-ended questions were asked relating to this theme. Overall, just under half of the participants noted that economic reasons had very little or no effect on their decision to quit school. In contrast, 7 participants reported that financial reasons played a notable role in their decisions to drop out. Several research-based studies have partially replicated these findings, showing that financial problems are indeed associated with early school leaving.

One of this study's positive aspects is that all the participants acknowledged the desire to return to school. They appeared to realize the economic value of further formal education. Two participants said their plans included graduating from high school, 9 participants said their plans included graduating from community college, while 1 participant said his ultimate goal was to graduate from university. Likewise, Berktold, Geis, and Kaufman's (1998) study using data from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study and its 1994 follow-up study found that 50% of the early school leavers ultimately completed high school. Two observations can be presented based on the "dropback" literature and this study's findings. First, the dropout rate for young offenders and others may be deceptively high if estimates are derived exclusively from studies employing retrospective or cross-sectional research designs. Second, because the participants seemed to recognize the importance of further education, their current dropout status may be only temporary. Frank (1996a), in reviewing data from the School Leavers Follow-Up Survey, presented yet another viewpoint, remarking that "for some, finishing high school is a longer process than it is for others" (p. 3).

The interview data also shed light on the participants' future vocational plans. Participants were asked several open-ended questions relating to their employment goals. Notably, nearly all the participants acknowledged definite plans. Additionally, one-quarter of this study's participants noted a strong desire to join the Canadian Armed Forces. Although why these participants wanted to join the Armed Forces is not entirely clear, they might have recently attended an information session, or possibly, they just wanted to find employment. Further analysis showed that these participants had no more than a Grade 8 education and, of the cohort, had the lowest number of accumulated high school credits.

Revised Conceptual Framework of the Factors Affecting Early School Leaving

A conceptual framework that revises Chapter Two's framework of the factors affecting early school leaving is displayed in Figure 8.1. From the review of the theoretical and empirical literature and the findings of this study, the present framework (Figure 8.1) was developed to illustrate the factors affecting early school leaving: (a)

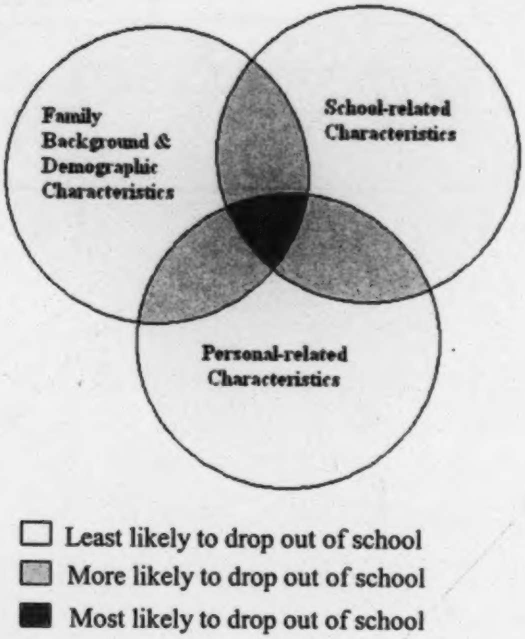

Family Background & Demographic Characteristics
School-related Characteristics
Personal-related Characteristics
☐ Least likely to drop out of school
▨ More likely to drop out of school
■ Most likely to drop out of school

Figure 8.1

Revised Conceptual Framework of the Factors Affecting Early School Leaving

family background and demographic characteristics, (b) personal characteristics, and (c) school-related characteristics. The specific factors associated with early school leaving can be found in Appendix E. The Venn diagram graphically represents the variables related to early school leaving. As the number of risk factors increases (i.e. the shading darkens in the Venn diagram), so does the likelihood of dropping out of school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, organized into three sections, are a synthesis based on the findings and conclusions of the preceding chapters, the research literature, the views of the participants, and the researcher's experience. The first and second sections offer recommendations for practice and further research, respectively, while the final section concludes with eight recommendations from the participants.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Despite dropping out of school, all 12 participants in this study expressed the desire to continue their education. In view of this finding, it is recommended that school jurisdictions establish policies and procedures that will facilitate the reentry of dropouts into the educational system. Providing nontraditional educational programs or schools geared towards independent, adult, and mastery learning would be beneficial. For example, Ecole George Vanier located in Montreal, Quebec; Project Excellence located in Cochrane, Ontario; and Bishop Carroll High School located in Calgary, Alberta continue to offer innovative alternatives to the rigid lock-step system of conventional schools.

2. In order to benefit troubled youth, learning environments need to be flexible, social, and personalized. In addition, class sizes should be relatively small, and the curriculum should reflect a balance between academic and technical courses. To increase the chances for academic success, programs also need to address conditions of the individuals' lives beyond school. For example, students with behavioural or substance-abuse problems may require specialized programming such as anger management or drug and alcohol counselling. It is also recommended that schools receive sufficient financial support in order to implement and maintain these programs.

3. The early school leavers in this study had almost never been involved in extracurricular activities such as athletic teams and clubs. In general, it has been reported in the research literature that participation in extracurricular activities significantly reduces the likelihood of young people leaving school early. Accordingly, it is recommended that schools systematically examine their extracurricular programs and develop procedures that encourage the participation of all students, particularly at-risk youths. For example, school personnel should explore the idea of accommodating students during their "spare" or free periods. Further, orientation activities should be carried out at various times throughout the school year in order to assist transfer students.

4. Disadvantaged and at-risk children need to be identified early in their academic careers and provided with support, guidance, and counselling in order to ensure their early success. More specifically, a program to ensure counselling following marital separation or divorce is strongly advised. It is recommended that the schools be responsible for these programs. When required, the schools should arrange for psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians to deal with students' personal problems. Continued monitoring of at-risk children as they progress through the elementary and secondary school systems is also recommended.

5. The early school leavers in this study were highly mobile, had little stability in their lives, and had experienced several household and school moves. Studies (e.g., Alspaugh, 1999; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Worrell, 1997) showed that mobility is highly correlated with the propensity to leave school early. Consequently, schools should target these transient individuals and set up programs that encourage engagement and social belonging. For instance, schools may consider establishing peer assistance, tutoring, and counselling programs. These programs would consist of volunteer students who would offer assistance to fellow students. Schools would provide some training for these volunteer students and match them with at-risk individuals having similar hobbies and interests.

6. Many early school leavers in this study had been employed during high school.

This study found that employment during high school may be related to academic disengagement and early school leaving. It is recommended that schools take a pro-active role in discouraging students from working more than fifteen hours per week. Federal and provincial government legislation could address this issue. It is also recommended that school efforts be made to inform parents and employers about the detrimental effects of excessive hours worked during the school week. Secondary schools may want to establish policies and procedures to address these concerns.

7. All the participants in this study had been referred by provincial youth court judges to a term of secure custody and, in general, represented a risk to either the community or themselves. Most of the youths were recidivists with lengthy and violent criminal records. When schools deal with individuals similar to the participants in this study, it is recommended that the schools establish close working relationships with the youth justice system in general and the police in particular. Further, a negotiated contract between the school and the young offender should be considered upon his or her reentry into the educational system. It is further recommended that schools establish a clear set of student behaviour rules that are enforced fairly and consistently among all students. That is, these rules should not be different from those that the general school population follow.

8. Finally, schools should encourage programs to improve communication between students and teachers. Specifically, students identified as being at risk of prematurely leaving school should be assigned a teacher-advisor to discuss academic matters and other non-school related issues. Further, the schools should also encourage programs that try to involve parents in their child's education. These programs are particularly important for dysfunctional, low-income, and single-parent families.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The respondents and their files reported varying accounts regarding family problems such as child abuse, mobility, parental rejection and substance abuse, family conflict, traumatic life events, and early behaviour problems. Therefore, a retrospective

study that also includes the person most knowledgeable about the respondent's background would be valuable.

2. For tracking, accounting, and research purposes, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments should consider working together to establish a nationwide student-record data base for early school leavers. It is further recommended that each school board in the country receive a regular listing of the names of students in its jurisdiction who have quit school. Improving accounting and tracking procedures has generally proven effective in lowering dropout rates because follow-up activities can be implemented only after school leavers have been identified (Oakland, 1992).

3. The findings of this study justify additional research into the youth justice system. In particular, it is recommended that research be conducted that seeks to distinguish dropouts from nondropouts within the youth justice system.

4. The results of this study suggest the need for a prospective longitudinal study that includes family background, as well as personal, school, and criminal characteristics related to early school leaving. It is further recommended that researchers study the young offenders who eventually graduate from school.

5. The literature (e.g., Foster et al., 1994) suggested that early school leaving should be analyzed from several perspectives by using dissimilar populations. Given that the present study focussed on male young offenders, it is recommended that this study should be replicated with a female group of young offenders. Analyzing early school leaving from this perspective will supply researchers with information about a topic that has received little scholarly attention. Researchers may also wish to study the differences between male and female dropouts.

6. Due to the purposive sampling techniques, the results from this study cannot be generalized beyond the participants under study. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated with a larger, representative sample to determine the results' generalizablility.

7. A problem encountered when studying both early school leaving and youth

deviance is determining the possible causal relationship. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers study this relationship more thoroughly.

Recommendations from the Participants

1. "There should be more independent learning at school."

2. "If money was not an issue, I would say they should hire more staff."

3. "I feel that the classes are too big in high school. If they are going to have big classes, they should have tutors or helpers in the classroom, people that are there that can help the slow kids. If these kids get stuck on something, there is someone there to help them. You can't expect the teacher to handle the whole class by themselves."

4. "They should get some kind of recreation hall in the school, somewhere you can go and play pool and stuff. At lunch time, you could go hang out there instead of just sitting around in the cafeteria or smoking in the parking lot."

5. "Make it easier to get back into school. Schools don't let people like me back in most of the time."

6. "Make the teaching funner, you know, instead of the usual things like reading out of the text books and writing and stuff, have the teachers teach in a fun way."

7. "I think the teachers need to be more like a friend or something instead of being an authority figure."

8. "I feel that there has to be more hands-on learning at school. Instead of just using the textbook they should go on more outings and stuff like that. If you give students more incentives, they are going to do better."

9. "Cut down on the classroom numbers and make it more one-on-one and caring."

Closing Thoughts

This study represents one more step in understanding the process of early school leaving. The present dissertation has revealed the specific traits, elements, relationships, and perceptions of 12 young-offender dropouts. Hopefully, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from this study may help inform policymakers, teachers, and school administrators about the dropout problem in general. Specifically, the findings may assist these individuals in dealing with this unique subgroup of the dropout population. Establishing awareness of a specific group of dropouts and encouraging questions for theory and practice may lead to solutions that may be revealed in future studies.

Finally, the desire to undertake the present study resulted from my personal observations as an administrator and educator of at-risk youth. A young mind can be developed into a productive, intelligent mind. Addressing the young offender's problems from an academic perspective will improve his or her chances for success in adulthood.

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Appendix A:

Letter of Request to Participate

William T. Smale
Department of Educational Administration
7-104 Education Building North
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2G5

<<fullname>><<address>><<postal code>>

Dear <<name>>

Re: Letter of consent to participate in the study on early school leaving

During the month of December, I will be conducting a study on early school leavers at [correctional institution name omitted]. You were selected for the study based on your age, gender, incarceration status, and dropout status.

As a participant in this study, you will be required to complete several audio-taped interviews with me at a mutually convenient time. At any time, you may withdraw your consent to participate in the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity are assured. Your name and correctional institution will not be revealed to anyone. In the study, your name and institution will be altered to protect your identity, and information about the correctional institution will be presented in a general manner.

It is hoped that this study will provide beneficial insights for future students at [correctional institution name omitted]. Your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes would be a valuable addition to this endeavour.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Yours sincerely,

William T. Smale

Consent: I have read and understand the information above. I have been given a copy of this form and had a chance to ask any questions related to the study. I agree and consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant:________________________Date:__________

Signature of Investigator:_______________________Date:__________

Appendix B:

Letter of Request to Participate

Consent to Disclosure, Transmittal, Photocopy or Examination of School Records, Ministry of Correction/Justice Records

Thesis Title: Understanding the Issue of Dropouts: A Young Offender Perspective

Description: The purpose of this study is to present the young offenders' perspective in order to understand the phenomena of early school leaving. It is being conducted by William Smale, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies, at the University of Alberta.

Confidentiality: Strict confidentiality will be followed and no individual identifying information will be disclosed. The names of participants and sponsoring institutions will be changed. Your name will not be associated to information gathered.

We (I)____
(youth/parent/guardian)

of____
(address)

hereby consent to the disclosure, photocopy, or examination by: ________________

in respect of____
(name of participant) **(date of birth)**

Consent: I have read the information above and understand the meaning of this information. I agree and consent to disclosure, transmittal, photocopy or examination of school records, ministry of correction records or information.

Signature of Participant:________________________Date:____________________

Signature of Investigator:________________________Date:____________________

Appendix C:

Verbal Consent Script

Verbal Consent Script

Thesis Title: Understanding the Issue of Dropouts: A Young Offender Perspective

Description: The purpose of this study is to present the young offenders' perspective in order to understand the phenomenon of early school leaving. This study is being conducted by William Smale, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies, at the University of Alberta. You were selected for the study based on your age, gender, incarceration status, and dropout status. Twelve participants will be enrolled in this study.

Procedure: You will be asked several questions relating to specific events in your past, as well as questions about your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards those events. You will also be asked about your reasons for leaving school early. Interviews will be recorded with audiotapes. Each interview will take about two hours of your time. You will be interviewed between two and four times.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There is no personal benefit financially for participating in the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your present or future relationship with the sponsoring institution. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to cease participation at any time without fear of reprisal or penalty.

Confidentiality: Strict confidentiality will be followed and no individual identifying information will be disclosed. The names of participants and sponsoring institutions will be changed. Your name will not be associated with the information gathered, but will be identified by a anonymous identification number or pseudonym. It should be noted that quotes from the interview transcripts will be used unedited in the text of the researcher's thesis. All transcripts will be kept confidential to the extent provided by federal and provincial law.

Offer to Answer Questions: You should feel free to ask questions now or at any time during the study. If you have questions about this study, you can contact William T. Smale at (403) 439-7175 or Dr. J. da Costa at (403) 492-7625. Any questions or complaints concerning the conduct of research should be addressed to Dr. Richards, Chair/Graduate Coordinator, Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, T6G 2G5.

Consent: I have listened to, read, and understand the information above. I have been given a copy of this form and had a chance to ask any questions related to the study. I agree and consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant:________________________Date:__________

Signature of Investigator:_______________________Date:__________

Appendix D:

Interview Guide

Interview Schedule

Family Background and Demographic Related Questions

Q1 Did your parents graduate from high school?
Q2 What grade did your father obtain?
Q3 What grade did your mother obtain?
Q4 Do you come from a single parent family?
Q5 Do you have any family problems?
Q6 How late can you stay out at night?
Q7 Did you have a history of low or high grades at school?
Q8 What do your parents say about these grades?
Q9 Who makes most of the decisions in your life. You or your parents?
Q10 How would you rate your parents income level, high, median, low?
Q11 What grade were you in when you dropped out of school?
Q12 Do you come from a family that is characterized by divorce, separation, remarriage, never married, or death of a parent?
Q13 Do you come from a family that is characterized by family violence?
Q14 Did you do any homework at school?
Q15 Did you have lots of friends at school?
Q16 Do you feel rejected by the school system?
Q17 Did you feel alienated at school?
Q18 Did you find school boring?
Q19 Did you like your teachers, the vice-principal, the principal?
Q20 Would you say your parents are strict or lenient?
Q21 Do you get along with your mother your father?
Q23 Does your mother work full-time, part-time, or not at all?
Q24 Does your father work full-time part-time, or not at all?
Q25 How many siblings do you have?
Q26 Do you like being with your family?
Q27 Would you characterize your parents as lax or strict?
Q28 Do you like being with your friends?
Q29 What are your friends like?
Q30 Are your friends dropouts?
Q31 Have your friends been in trouble also? What percent have been in trouble?
Q32 Did they influence you to either dropout of school or to get into trouble?
Q33 Is your father controlling?
Q34 Is your mother controlling?
Q35 Do you view your parents as loving and actively involved in your life?
Q36 Has anyone in your family had a life threatening illness? If so has this been a stressful time for you?
Q37 Do your parents hassle you at home?

Q38 Have your siblings ever got into trouble?
Q39 Have your siblings dropped out of school?

Personal Related Questions

Q40 Did you have problems with your mother when you were younger?
Q41 When you were living at home how late could you stay out at night?
Q42 Who was stricter, your mother or your father?
Q43 When you were having problems with your mother was that related to you staying out late?
Q44 Did you dropout of school first and then get into trouble or did you get into trouble after you had dropped out.
Q45 How much time have you spent in jail?
Q46 Do you think school is important for future employability and success?
Q47 Did you have a negative or positive feeling toward school?
Q48 Did you have any anger problems in high school?
Q49 Was money a factor in your decision to leave school?
Q50 Where do you get your money from then?
Q51 Did you work part-time when you went to school? How many hours?
Q52 Did you work after you had left school?
Q53 How many jobs have you had since grade 9?
Q54 Have you ever repeated a grade?
Q55 Do you plan on returning to school once your sentence has expired?
Q56 Did you have low grades?
Q57 Overall, how were your marks in elementary school?
Q58 Overall, how were your marks in high school?
Q59 Did you feel isolated at school?
Q60 Did you skip class?
Q61 How many times would you skip class in a week?
Q62 What about elementary school?
Q63 Have you ever abused drugs or alcohol?
Q64 Did you party a lot at school?
Q65 Do you have any learning disabilities?
Q66 How many elementary schools have you attended?
Q67 Did you get kicked out of any of these schools?
Q68 What did your parents say about that?
Q69 How did you find the teachers at the elementary level?
Q70 Have you ever failed a grade?
Q71 What subjects didn't you like at high school?
Q72 What subjects did you like?
Q73 How did you behave in elementary school?
Q74 Did you ever throw anything at the teacher?
Q75 How did you behave in high school?

Q76 Did you fight at high school?
Q77 What level were you in before you dropped out of school, basic, general, or advanced?
Q78 How many other schools did you attend?
Q79 Did you like your teachers in high school?
Q80 Did you have a problem keeping up at school?
Q81 Did you take part in extracurricular school activities?
Q82 Do you consider yourself a dropout?
Q83 Do you have a good or poor attitude toward school?
Q84 What do your parents think of you being in jail?
Q85 Does your family come and visit you?
Q86 Do you like being with your family?
Q87 Who would you rather be with, you sisters your mother or your father?
Q88 Why do you think your friends were a bad influence on you?
Q89 What kind of drugs were you guys into?
Q90 Did your friends commit crime when they were in school?
Q91 How old are your mother and father?
Q92 Who hassles you the most?

School Related Questions

Q93 Have you ever thought about going to university?
Q94 Were you getting into trouble before or after you dropped out of school?
Q95 What kind of trouble were you getting in at school?
Q96 Did you want to leave school?
Q97 What were your reasons for leaving school?
Q98 Was leaving school your own idea?
Q99 Why did they agree with your decision to drop out of high school?
Q100 What reasons did they give you?
Q101 In sentencing, did the judge have any comments regarding your decision to drop out of school?
Q102 What did others say about your decision to leave school? What did your parents say?
Q103 What did you say when they told you that? Did you really attempt to go back?
Q104 What did your teachers say when you dropped out? Did you go in and see any of them?
Q105 What did your probation officer say?
Q106 What did you do from that gap between grade 9 and age 16.
Q107 Did you get caught for any of that stuff?
Q108 When you went in front of the judge, did he ever say you should be attending school?
Q109 What did the school guidance counsellor say?
Q110 What did the principal or vice-principal say?

Q111 Did you ever see a school psychologist?
Q112 How did it go?
Q113 What did your friends say when you left school?
Q114 When you were getting into trouble did you do it on your own or with your friends.
Q115 Was there anything you particularly liked about elementary school?
Q116 What about high school?
Q117 Was there anything you particularly disliked about school?
Q118 Would you consider yourself a bully at school?
Q119 Do you think you were a bully?
Q120 What grade were you in when you left school?
Q121 What kind of class were you in?
Q122 Why did you go into that program and not the advanced?
Q123 What did you particularly like about the general level of instruction?
Q124 What did you dislike about the general level of instruction?
Q125 Which school courses did you like most?
Q126 What school courses did you dislike the most?
Q127 Were there any subjects which you would have liked to have studied but were not offered at your school?
Q128 What changes do you feel would have made school more interesting for you? What are your recommendations for changing the school?
Q129 What type of teachers would you like to see?
Q130 Did you tell your teachers, guidance counsellor, vice-principal, or principal what you felt should be changed?
Q131 Do you plan to return to school?
Q132 What have you learned about yourself since being incarcerated?
Q133 Do you think this has been a positive or negative experience?
Q134 How would you rate your teachers overall, caring or uncaring?
Q135 How many times were you suspended?
Q136 How many days at a time?
Q137 Was there a major incident why you got kicked out of school?
Q138 What advice would you give a friend if they were considering leaving school?

Appendix E:

Factors Affecting Early School Leaving

Factors Affecting Early School Leaving

Family Background and Demographic Characteristics

*low socioeconomic background
*persistent or occasional poverty
*low IQ and ability level
*minority ethnic background
*non-English speaking families
*immigrant status
*neighbourhood and community characteristics
*lone-parent status
*male gender
*large families
*several natural or step-siblings
*other sibling dropouts
*early autonomy
*early pregnancy
*high residential mobility
*high school mobility
*being homeless
*low parental educational attainment
*low parental educational involvement
*parental unemployment
*low parental job status
*permissive parenting style
*low educational expectations
*parental criminality
*parental substance abuse

Personal-Related Characteristics

*behavioural problems
*emotional problems
*antisocial personality disorder
*early-onset conduct disorder
*social immaturity
*confrontation with authority figures
*involvement with police
*involvement with the youth justice system
*incarceration
*low self-esteem
*normlessness
*influenced by negative peer pressure
*association with dropout friends
*association with deviant friends
*over work
*favourable labour force opportunities
*low level of extracurricular participation
*substance abuse

School-Related Characteristics

*negative attitude toward school
*poor school attendance
*school discipline problems
*school suspensions
*school expulsions
*below grade level for age
*feeling of school alienation
*large class size
*school boredom
*low academic achievement
*grade failure
*difficulties in learning
*consignment to a nonacademic stream
*increased academic standards
*negative student-teacher rapport
*high teacher turnover
*inadequate teacher education-inservice